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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Weekly Journal of Opinion

NOVEMBER 11, 1991

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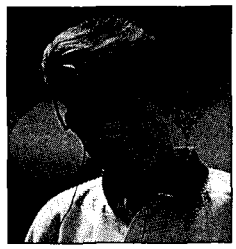

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FROM WASHINGTON

Desert storm

Time: the second week in October.

Scene: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The house of a very old, very wise man. Or at least he is certainly very old, and we have been told that he is very wise—a philosopher and writer of Arabic poetry, a lover of peace, an adviser to one of the more serious princes. We must take the wisdom bit on faith, since he speaks no English, but he certainly looks the part: gaunt, bearded, dressed in the traditional *thobe*. He sits in a circle of sons and acolytes, plus a small group of visiting Americans. Tiny cups of Arabic coffee are served, followed by tiny glasses of sweetened tea, followed by water and fruit juice, followed by an elaborate meal. Outside, the gentle thrum of air-conditioning compressors.

The old man speaks. The Americans lean forward. An aide translates:

"He says, 'This Anita Hill. Do you think she's telling the truth?' "

I missed the whole thing. When I left America on October 7, Clarence Thomas was due to be confirmed easily the next day. Eight days later, the day he was actually confirmed, I returned to a country transformed by an experience I can never fully share. An entire cast of characters had been added to the nation's stock of cultural references. Some had comic names like Long Dong Silver and John Doggett III. Who are these people? One, I gather, is noteworthy for the extraordinary length of his résumé. Don't ask me which.

Unlike visiting Americans, many of the Saudis we talked to were able to follow the entire proceedings via their home satellite dishes. "I was up until 5 a.m., translating for my wife," yawned one prince. (Don't be too impressed with all this talk of princes. There are something like 5,000 of them.) The predominant Saudi reaction—beyond the appalled fascination shared, it seems, by the entire human race—was twofold. First, incredulity at the fuss. In the words of a businessman: "What sort of successful man doesn't do this sort of thing?" Second, vindication of the Saudi way of life. If you don't want hanky-panky between men and women, they reasoned gleefully, keep the sexes totally segregated as we do. By "Saudi reaction" I mean, of course, the reaction among Saudi men. If there are more than three or four women in the entire country, you could have fooled me.

But this reaction, although sexist, is at least sincere and authentic. That is in contrast to the reaction to the affair among conservatives in our country, which seems inauthentic on several levels. One of my TNR colleagues insists that, having been AWOL during the incredible week itself, I have forfeited forever the right to comment. But of course if columnists were ever to adopt a self-denying ordinance against commenting on things they know nothing about, the nation's opinion surplus would rapidly turn into an even more dire shortage. So I proceed.

Talking with people who did sit through the whole drama, I have been struck that Anita Hill's supporters tend to believe, perhaps tendentiously, that their flag bearer was generally telling the truth, whereas Clarence Thomas's supporters tend to believe something more complicated: that the truth lies somewhere in between their two stories, or in some third scenario. Perhaps he did come on to her, but not as aggressively or vulgarly as she maintains. Perhaps they had an affair. Perhaps she came on to him unsuccessfully, and this is her revenge. And so on.

Almost every plausible scenario except Anita Hill's own would seriously mitigate, if not wipe out, the charge of sexual harassment. Many Thomas supporters may agree privately with my Saudi friends that even Hill's own scenario does not describe a hanging offense. Having left the country the day the story broke, I expected that contention to become part of the public debate. But it never did, because Thomas denied everything under oath. As an ironic result, an extremely broad definition of sexual harassment is now beyond public dispute even by conservatives. Fine and dandy. But as Thomas supporters weave their exculpatory scenarios—even in print—they seem remarkably indifferent to the fact that they are indicting their own man for perjury. Two people may have lied to the committee, but only one of them was up for the Supreme Court.

Offering his own scenario on *The New York Times* op-ed page (Thomas's "Rabelaisian humor" must be understood in its "psycho-cultural context" of a conversation between two Southern rural blacks), the Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson writes: "If my interpretation is correct, Judge Thomas was justified in denying making the remarks, even if he had in fact made them," because "any admission would have immediately incurred a ... grossly unfair punishment." I suspect many Thomas supporters think this but don't dare say it. Of course perjury ain't what it used to be. These same people didn't care that he claimed under oath never to have discussed *Roe* v. *Wade*.

A second category of disingenuousness among Thomas supporters concerns the so-called "process." Even those who choose to believe Clarence Thomas's whole story can't seriously maintain that the charges against him were exposed as transparently false and absurd, unworthy of consideration. So what is all this talk of Republicans making the hearings part of their general indictment of an out-of-control Congress? No doubt they will do so. But where's the logic?

President Bush has been slippery on this point. He has said the charges were "unfounded" and not worth pursuing. He has also said they should have been investigated in closed sessions, while he continues to lambaste "women activist feminist groups" for pursuing the charges at all. Clearly the charges were investigated badly (though Thomas's opponents have more legitimate grounds for complaint than his supporters in this regard). But the implied position of those who rant about the leak and the hearings is that the charges of sexual harassment shouldn't have been pursued at all—something they should be forced to admit if they insist on making an issue of it.

Ditto the general hand-wringing about scandal-mongering, invasion of privacy, the search for personal dirt replacing weightier considerations, etc. These are all valid issues. But unless you think Anita Hill's charges were irrelevant *even if true*, the Clarence Thomas case does not illuminate such fine public-spirited concerns.

Indeed, coming from Saudi Arabia, I was struck by the lack of alarm about nominee Thomas's moral and spiritual condition on the part of America's own social conservatives. When Thomas refused to answer questions on his possible interest in pornographic films, no Republican senator rose to insist. When *Newsweek* reported that a prominent newspaper is sitting on a list of X-rated movies rented by Judge Thomas, Gary Bauer did not demand that the list be released. Bauer, as head of the Domestic Policy Council, was the social issues Ayatollah in the Reagan White House. Now he runs something called the Family Research Council which crusades against homosexuals, pornography, etc. He also was head of the Citizens Committee to Confirm Clarence Thomas.

As a liberal, it does not bother me if a Supreme Court justice is an aficionado of pornographic movies. I think it's nobody else's business. But why does it not bother Gary Bauer?

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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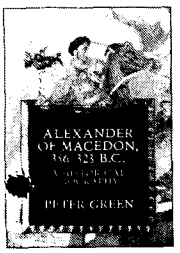

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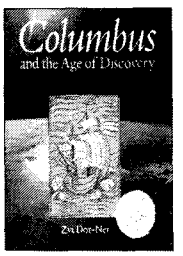

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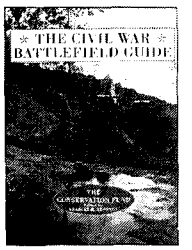

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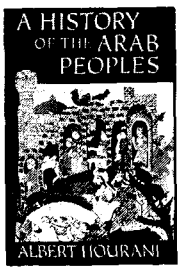

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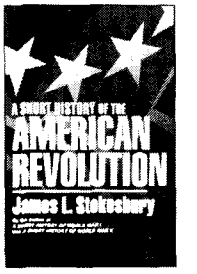

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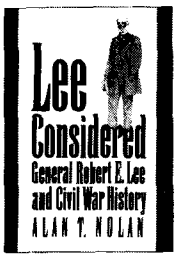

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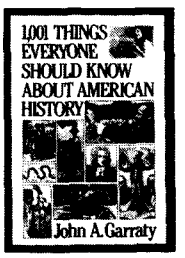

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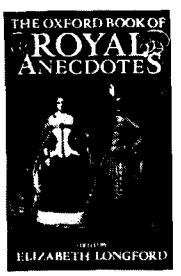

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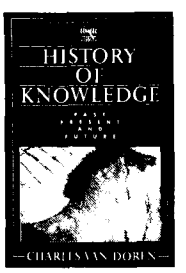

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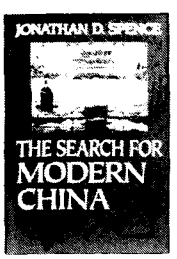

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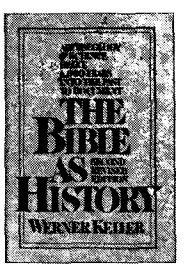

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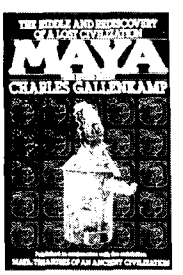

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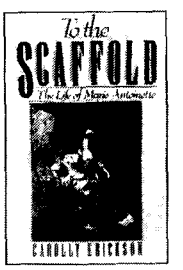

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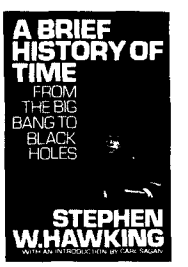

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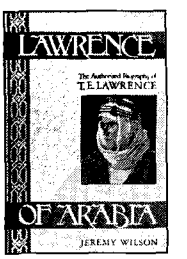

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CORRESPONDENCE

Dragging us down

To the editors:

I just read Jonathan Rieder's "Crown of Thorns" and David Evanier's "Invisible Man" in the October 14 issue on the racial tension and hatred between blacks and Jews (and others) in New York. These articles point up an issue I find increasingly disturbing and disappointing: that many blacks are so very quick to find a reason to hate a group of people (Koreans, Jews, whites, etc.). Do we hate them because they have found the wherewithal to better their conditions when we are unwilling to do the same?

I am black and believe I understand the reason and history of blacks' mistrust and hatred of non-blacks. But I believe that some only drag us all down by using our past as an excuse to pillage and plunder ourselves and our communities. The black community is falling apart rapidly. We look to the government to provide what we should provide ourselves. Far too many babies are being born to single and teenage mothers. We do not teach or spend time with our children. We provide no role models for them to look up to. We do not accept responsibility for our condition. Martin Luther King would have wanted us to find strength within ourselves rather than feeling sorry for ourselves.

AMANDA SUE VARONA
Seattle, Washington

Luck of the Irish

To the editors:

"It would be a foolish response to the stereotype of Irishmen to say, 'I'll show them,' and go get plastered," Michael Kinsley notes (TRB, "Don't Be Pushy," October 14). I am glad for his sake that he is a Jew and not an Irishman. Presumably Michael Kinsley as Irishman would never, poor fellow, dare to take a drink. Yet that would be a lot less servile than a Jew who admits to cringing when other Jews lobby.

CYNTHIA OZICK
New Rochelle, New York

Suburban exile

To the editors:

Together with other recent pieces, Jonathan Rauch's "Thought Crimes" (October 7) confirmed the emergence of your magazine as one of the best venues for thoughtful gay political writing in America. I would add only one point to his argument. The general breakdown of law and order in American cities is a greater threat to gays *as a community* than to many other groups. The gay subculture needs the critical mass that only cities can provide. If forced to follow their heterosexual siblings to suburban exile, gays will lose both the institutions and social conditions that help make them "gay," and not just homosexual.

Gay politicians cannot seem to budge from a narrow agenda of symbolic issues that serve mostly to antagonize the middle class and religious groups who share our real interest in a civilized environment. In the meantime, the deterioration of such previously safe neighborhoods as Greenwich Village is destroying some of the few constituencies in America that can be counted on to take such politicians seriously.

BARRY YOUNGERMAN
New York, New York

Partisan response

To the editors:

In "The One and the Many" (October 7) Istvan Deak refers to the massacres of Serbs by the Croatian Ustasha regime during the Second World War, and adds that the Serbian Chetniks and the Communist Partisans "repaid in kind." However, the massacre of Serbs by the Croat-Axis regime was a systematic genocide in the hundreds of thousands, while the Serbian reprisals—however condemned—involved a relatively small number and were unplanned. Even if the Serbs had wanted to retaliate on a large scale, it would have been physically impossible because they did not control areas with significant Croatian populations. Partisan retaliations were mainly at or near the end of the war, and they were aimed primarily at opponents of communism.

In addition, I find it puzzling that Mr. Deak does not mention the London Treaty of 1915, which motivated the Allies to offer the Serbs a Great Serbia on the proverbial silver platter, which the Serbs rejected (much to their misfortune and ruin as it turns out) in favor of a Yugoslav state.

ALEX N. DRAGNICH
Bowie, Maryland

The writer is professor emeritus at Vanderbilt University.

Dangerous adversary

To the editors:

Regarding Martin Peretz's "Bush vs. Israel" (October 7): I don't know why scapegoating Israel should be easier with Yitzhak Shamir, whom the author accuses of being "unpleasant and unyielding." I think the main reason is that the patrician Bush is uncomfortable with the Jew Shamir. I see no evidence of Prime Minister Shamir's unpleasantness in the media, where he is all smiles. As to his being unyielding, I don't see what he has to yield. Israel without the West Bank is an Arab victim. By comparison, Mr. Bush is not asking Syria to yield up its Jewish hostages (some 5,000) or the Golan Heights, so necessary to Israel's security.

Israel is not sufficiently credited for having won the first battle of the Persian Gulf in 1981, when it destroyed Saddam Insane's nuclear capability. All of a sudden President Bush is favoring Assad and Egypt, who did little to support him in the Persian Gulf, and also the PLO, who were against us. In the Gulf war President Bush didn't destroy "Israel's most dangerous adversary." He principally destroyed America's most dangerous adversary. He sure wouldn't send a half million soldiers to defend Israel.

JEROME GREENBLATT
Laguna Hills, California

Political correction

To the editors:

In the September 9 Notebook ("P.C. R.I.P."), you criticized a recent ACE survey that found political and cultural controversy is not widespread on American campuses. You say that school "administrators are peacekeepers, and a worthless sample for the purpose of judging levels of controversy."

Cheap shot. You evidently didn't bother to examine the full survey or its methodology before sounding off. The questions concerning the so-called political correctness controversy constituted only four of the nearly 200 questions on ACE's eighth annual "Campus Trends" survey of senior administrators. Most focused on such matters as faculty, finances, assessment, and enrollment. A related set of questions on social issues asked whether institutions had experienced incidents of intolerance related to race, gender, or sexual preference. More than one-third of the respondents at all universities, and fully 74 percent at doctoral institutions, answered affirmatively. It makes little sense that these officials, who are promised anonymity for themselves and their schools, would attempt to cover up political or cultural controversy but readily acknowledge incidents of racial and sexual intolerance.

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

NOVEMBER 11, 1991

MADRID FANDANGO

Peace is a consummation devoutly to be wished, but not every peace is like every other peace, and not all peace talks are like all other peace talks. The negotiations between Israel and its Arab enemies, now scheduled to begin in Madrid on the day before Halloween, are an occasion for happiness. But the dourness with which this breakthrough has been greeted, particularly in Israel, also has a basis in reality. Whatever the outcome of the talks, the Arab resentment of a permanent sovereign Jewish presence in the Middle East will continue to exist. And, given the mercurial character of Arab politics, that resentment remains a danger to Israel.

Still, Israel and the Palestinians, Israel and Syria, Israel and Jordan, Israel and Lebanon, will address each other directly. And not even the extravagant complications of Levantine diplomacy will preclude a few moments of truth. The Palestinians will have to decide if they are prepared for realism, if they prefer the gradual improvement of their condition to the immediate gratifications of maximalist speech, if an eventual part of what they desire is more attractive than nothing at all. The Syrians in particular will have to decide if the corruption represented by their refusal to recognize the existence of Israel is any longer tolerable, now that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demonstration of American power in the Gulf have crippled the old illusions about pushing Israel into the sea and the Americans out of the region. The Jordanians will have to decide if they have the guts to transform their de facto state of non-belligerence toward Israel into a de jure peace. But, then, their Parliament has already come out against the peace conference itself.

Israel has always objected to diplomatic strategies of indirection, has always insisted upon face-to-face negotiations, precisely to make such decisions unavoidable, and plain to the entire world. Not that Israel will itself be spared its moment of truth. In the negotiations over the future of the occupied territories, there will come a point when some land captured in the defensive war of 1967 will have to be exchanged for peace. Resolution 242 enshrined precisely this principle, the revisionisms of today's Israeli government notwithstanding. Indeed, the present Israeli government may find all this too much to bear. For strategic, ideological, and political reasons, it does not wish to surrender any territory at all, and has done its best over the past couple of years to persuade whoever would listen that Resolution 242 means nothing of the kind.

For the purpose of a peace with the Palestinians, which will take the form of territorial compromise or take no form at all, Yitzhak Shamir is almost certainly the wrong man in the wrong place at the wrong time. It would have been the better part of diplomatic imagination for the Israeli government to have spent the past spring and summer producing their own peace plans, their own maps, their own account of what is possible and what is not possible. If they did not, it was not because they are diplomatically incompetent. It is because Shamir and Company have no map of any interest, at least from the standpoint of a peace, to produce. They want it all.

But such plans do exist in Israel, and they find favor not only among Labor but among the younger and more moderate elements of the Likud. They are aimed, of course, at ensuring the country's security, but they go far toward meeting Palestinian ambitions. One plan now being widely discussed in Israel was first broached in THE NEW REPUBLIC ("A Peace Plan" by Avraham Wachman, September 5, 1988). Another, by Clinton Bailey, an Israeli historian of Palestinian and Bedouin cultures, appears in the October 25 issue of *The Jerusalem Report*. In both of these proposals, Israel would retain some land that is crucial, mostly along the Jordan river, but that is inhabited by only some 20,000 Palestinian Arabs. Another one-and-a-half million of these people, and the land on which they live in Gaza and the West Bank, would no longer be under Israeli political rule.

Still, it would be irresponsible to reduce all of Israel's anxieties about the upcoming negotiations to the ideological inflammations of the Likud. There *are* grounds for worry. For a start, not one of its Arab interlocutors has approached Israel in anything remotely resembling the spirit in which it was approached by Anwar Sadat in 1977. Neither Hafez Assad nor King Hussein nor Yasir Arafat has experienced anything like Sadat's change of heart

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and mind. The Arabs are coming to the table in a singularly unvisionary way, dragged to it by circumstances, the most pressuring circumstance of all being the loss of the Soviet power that propped up their side for decades in this deadly game; and they appear to be bringing their old ends with them.

The Syrian spirit is particularly galling. They have made no pretenses about their utter lack of interest in a genuine peace with Israel. The foreign minister has proudly refused to shake his Israeli counterpart's hand. (It would have been hard to do anyway, as his hand is always in James Baker's.) And the Syrians are noisily declining to participate in the regional talks, that is, in precisely that "track" of the negotiations that may provide the proof that Israel's neighbors are prepared to coexist with it in normalcy. It is also the "track" that the U.S. government back in May assured Jerusalem would follow swiftly upon the opening of the conference. For its churlishness Syria expects the return of all of the Golan Heights, from which it once made a daily hell of the Israeli north. And none of this has put a crimp in the State Department's infatuation with Damascus. In his enthusiasm for Assad, Baker has matched his boss's fondness for Deng Xiaoping—matched it in intensity and unseemliness. It is true that Syria no longer poses quite the threat to Israel that it did when the Soviets were stuffing the Syrian arsenal and there were other Arab states prepared to join it in a war. But surface-to-surface missiles have not quite made the Golan Heights into a strategic luxury: the Golan would be critical if Syria decided once again to send its tanks and mortar against Israel. And the Syrian control of all the area from occupied Lebanon to the borders of Iraq is a disturbing new reality that rightly keeps Israel on its guard.

About the Palestinians, too, a few cautions. It will be an important day, a day for which many Israelis and Palestinians have waited and suffered, when the Palestinians finally turn up to talk. But if they turn up expecting a slow march to the fulfillment of their fondest dream, this conference will end calamitously. For "land for peace" is, in essence, a partition plan, and the Palestinians too must agree to split what they claim the entire right to. (The Jews agreed to this, after a wrenching debate that almost destroyed the Zionist movement, in 1947.) Israel occupies the land, and so it is Israel's partially to surrender; but the same sort of partial surrender must occur in the Palestinian imagination, or there will be no peace. Autonomy, moreover, is not cartographically significant. The autonomy plan that will probably be the first fruit of the Israeli-Palestinian talks will obtain over all of the territory captured in 1967; but that must not mean any sort of canonization of the 1967 borders. They are justifiably unacceptable to Israel. Territorial compromise represents not a return to the 1967 borders, which are the 1949 armistice lines, but their permanent and significant modification.

The Palestinians (and the Americans) would do well to note that they have already achieved an important victory over Israel. It is that Yitzhak Shamir is treating with the PLO. No, not directly; but the somnambulistic relationship of the Palestinian delegation in the territories to the Palestinian leadership in Tunis is documented in every day's paper. At this late date in the development of Palestinian politics there are no Palestinians of any importance (with the ominous exception of the fundamentalists of Hamas) who are not in the service of the PLO. And the fact that Shamir has recognized this is an important Israeli concession.

There are other irritations as well. What, for example, is a Soviet government that cannot even enforce order between Armenians and Azerbaijanis doing brokering peace between Israel and the Arabs? The great error about the Soviet recognition of Israel is that it comes precisely when it is no longer needed. It was when the Soviets had the power to harm Israel that their change of policy would have been welcome. Now it is just another cheap Soviet bid for international legitimacy. Mr. Baker, of course, is incapable of recognizing this. It has been one of his principal axioms not to let Russian history get in the way of his cherished summitry.

If Mr. Baker has in mind a quick Nobel Prize-winning fix, he will almost certainly fail. This is the Middle East, not Houston, Texas: here deals are *hard*. And the stuff of these deals is not only interests, but feelings, memories, symbols, gods. The impatience that has characterized the Bush administration in foreign policy, and its reliance on victory abroad to console it for (and distract the attention of Americans from) defeat at home, will not stand it in good stead in Madrid. It is no mean achievement to have turned the "peace process" into a peace process, to have brought these embittered enemies face to face, but this is only the beginning.

THE GERMAN DELUSION

Last week, while the British were safely off at their Commonwealth Conference in Zimbabwe, the French and Germans announced a major increase in the troops committed to the Western European Union, from 5,000 to 30,000. It was the latest piece of evidence that the EC countries—in particular, Germany—are ready to bear more military and diplomatic responsibility in Europe and beyond. The swift superpower disarmament on the Continent, the resilience of the German economy, the relative economic decline of the United States—all these have also added to the force of the argument.

It is, however, an empirically dubious one, and those now fretting over the possible obsolescence of NATO need not get too alarmed. Just over a year after unification, the new Germany is in no shape, politically, economically, psychologically, to play the role some Americans are yearning for. The country faces still massive economic consolidation and adjustment. Its social equilibrium—regional, religious, cultural—has yet to be found. Its reluctance to become an international superpower has deepened since reunification. Even in its immediate sphere of influence, Western and Eastern

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Europe, Germany is still a diplomatic weakling.

Germany's military power is decreasing. The Bundeswehr, like most European armies, is shrinking: by 1994 it will be reduced from the current 655,000 to about 370,000, a minuscule fraction of which will be committed to the WEU. Article 87 of Germany's Basic Law still curtails Germany's ability to act militarily, except in its own defense. Article 24 allows the country to join in "a system of mutual collective security for the maintenance of peace," meaning the deployment of German forces outside the country, but there's still massive hostility to it. Although Helmut Kohl tried to shift public opinion on this during the Gulf war, he failed. A postwar poll showed that only 32 percent of Germans supported amending the constitution to allow the Bundeswehr to join in U.N. peacekeeping operations. Fifty-three percent were against.

Forty years of peace, even cold peace, and the inculcation of pacifist ideals have taken their toll on the German mind. The Germans contributed $11 billion to Desert Storm, $2 billion more than Japan, and $4 billion more than Kuwait. Afterward they felt extorted; next time they may refuse to participate financially at all. They didn't respond kindly to arguments that lower oil prices disproportionately affected their oil-importing economy. Germans use less than half as much oil per capita as the United States, and tax it far more heavily. The average American uses 484 gallons of gas a year; the average German, 206.

Even within Europe, where the new Germany is a dominant economic force, German political clout is a chimera. In the EC's cramped, futile attempts to keep Yugoslavia together, and to broker a succession of failed cease-fires between the warring states, Germany trod very carefully in a region where German intervention is a touchy point. Even in less delicate areas—such as European monetary and political union—Germany has been eager to let the French, Italians, and British make the running, and exert its influence gently.

Added to this is the enormous cost of reunification. The bill is still coming in: $30 billion to pay off the Kremlin for acceding to reunification and withdrawing the Red Army from East Germany; $40 billion for moving the capital from Bonn to Berlin; $165 billion to modernize the East German rail and road networks; $15 billion to repair the East's shattered environment; $3.5 billion to tear down East Germany's unsafe nuclear reactors and dispose of the waste; $9 billion to modernize the East's military facilities; a $5 billion-a-year subsidy for the old East German rail system.

Most expensive of all, the federal government will have to cover the deficit of the Treuhandanstalt (Trustee Institute), the institution set up to privatize the East German economy. The Treuhand is projected to lose about $14 billion this year and $22 billion next year. By the year 2000 it may be as much as $240 billion total in the red. The result should be familiar to most Americans: big budget deficits. Germany's federal deficit this year will be around $80 billion, rising to around $90 billion by 1994. The national debt will soon break $900 billion. To pay for this, Kohl set a record for breaking campaign promises by imposing a slew of "reunification taxes" shortly after his sweeping victory in last December's all-German elections. The income tax went up by 7.5 percent, the gas tax by fifteen cents a liter, and telephone tariffs also shot up.

The result has been a slump in the economy and inflation higher than France's. Unemployment stands at 6.2 percent nationally. Everything is ten times worse in the East. More than a million East Germans—12.1 percent of the work force—are out of work now, and worse is to come. Culturally, too, the strains of uniting a religious South with an atheist East are beginning to be felt. The former Easterners are atheists (only 34 percent believe in God) and the Westerners are believers (70 percent believe). The East, where religious at all, is predominantly Protestant; the West is evenly split between Catholics and Lutherans. The East believes in authority (57 percent found the concept sympathetic) and the West distrusts it (only 31 percent). There are eight times as many foreigners living in the West, yet it is mostly young, male, unemployed East Germans who have taken to beating up Vietnamese guest workers, throwing Namibians out of windows, and pushing Mozambicans from streetcars. As many as 50,000 East Germans may belong to one neofascist group or another. One sign of the strength of this pressure is that the government has been forced to capitulate to declare that it would house foreigners seeking asylum in camps.

We have no doubt that in the long term, the German economy will prosper and that the social and cultural stresses of the new Germany will play themselves out. But the short term looks grim. The IMF predicts growth in Germany will slow from 1991 to 1992, and the pressures of immigration are likely to grow. This is no scenario for brave new initiatives, either diplomatic or military. NATO is not likely to be replaced by the WEU anytime soon. Neither is American leadership and involvement on a still fragile and unstable continent.

NOTEBOOK

GLAD TO HEAR IT, GEORGE: "Obviously, when you see somebody go berserk and get a weapon and go in and murder people, of course, it troubles me." —President Bush, October 17. Readers are hereby invited to submit to the Notebook any egregiously dumb, ungrammatical, malapropian, impenetrable, or crass comments made (in the public record) by the president of the United States. We'll publish them regularly in this space.

CLUCK, CLUCK: Having passed the House last week, the so-called crime bill is finally on its way to becoming law. We say so-called because the bill is a package of tough-sounding measures that no one seriously thinks

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will do anything about crime in the streets. Limiting appeals by death row prisoners, expanding the death penalty to such crimes as assassinating the vice president, and raising the minimum sentence for dealing drugs near housing projects are exactly the types of measures that appeal to Mr. Bush: they're cheap, easy, and popular with voters. Programs that might make those voters safer, however, like more support for local law enforcement, tackling the underclass, or reducing the availability of cheap guns, are, needless to say, nowhere in the bill. Even after the massacre in Killeen, Texas, House gun control supporters couldn't muster a majority for a ban on semi-automatic weapons. Rest assured, however, that murdering a federal poultry inspector is now punishable by death.

DISTURBING THE PEACE: The budget deficit this year may reach $350 billion. A tiny but deeply satisfying reduction would be achieved by cutting the $9 million earmarked for the United States Institute of Peace. An advisory body whose advice no one in the State Department needs or wants, the institute has been searching for a purpose since it was founded in the early 1980s. It survives today as a welfare hotel for political scientists who can't get grants from private foundations, and as a retirement home for aging arms control negotiators. Should the institute close its doors, we would of course miss its monthly journal, replete with valuable lessons on such topics as the meaning of the word "ultimatum," and its "Helpful hints for U.S. negotiators in Middle East" (hint #1: "Timing in launching an effort can be decisive"). But we're willing to make the sacrifice.

BUSINESS AS USUAL: Days after being publicly incapacitated by their racial politics in the Thomas hearings, the Democrats returned last week to their most urgent order of business: the Civil Rights Act of 1991. This is a bill that could almost have been designed to entrench the current fault-lines in the Democratic coalition, splitting whites from blacks, and plays perfectly into George Bush's cynical hands. Its effect in the workplace may well be to encourage informal racial engineering and further fray already strained racial tensions in the country. But even if one believes the bill will actually do some marginal good, a more tangible political question remains: Why the priority? Do the Democrats have a martyr complex? It's more than unfortunate that the week after David Duke's victory in Louisiana, the Democrats shoud be providing him with even more rhetorical ammunition.

REB RONNIE: According to *The Denver Post*, former President Reagan canceled an Oxford University "lecture on the Jewish code of ethics and morality" after learning that Kitty Kelley had been invited to speak as well. We never pegged the Gipper for a Talmudist. But *mazel tov* just the same. •

DOMINICAN POSTCARD

VILLA NARCO

By Bill Berkeley

In the lush tropical highlands of the Dominican Republic, dirt roads trace through tobacco fields, banana plantations, and tin-roof towns with grimy, fly-strewn markets. Barefoot girls carry huge buckets of water on their heads past roadside piles of pineapples, coconuts, and bright purple eggplants for sale under bamboo lean-tos. Young boys hustle to shine your shoes and wash your car windows. Men in straw hats gamble their meager earnings in thatch-domed cockfighting rings.

Amid this typical Third World tableau, about two hours north of Santo Domingo, there is a startling anomaly worthy of Oz. Brand new pastel-colored mansions are sprouting up with terraces and manicured gardens. Satellite dishes beam from every roof. Garages are filled with Mercedes Benzs, BMWs, Volvos, and *jipetas*—four-wheel-drive Jeeps and Toyota Landcruisers. Young men with permed hairdos and gold chains around their necks recline on their patios while construction workers toil amid mounds of cinderblock and cement dust.

This is San Francisco de Macorís, the ultimate destination for hundreds of millions of dollars in laundered cocaine earnings from New York City and much of the rest of the United States. All but unheard of outside the DR, this remote city of 200,000 is becoming a Caribbean version of Medellín.

Over the past several years Dominicans have emerged as New York's pre-eminent retail distributors of crack and powder cocaine—the "foot soldiers for the Colombians," as they've become known. Police have realized only recently that nearly three-quarters of the young Dominicans arrested on drug charges are recent arrivals from this provincial city and the surrounding countryside. A loose confederation of drug gangs in Upper Manhattan has begun to call itself the "San Francisco Cartel." Increasingly, Dominicans are expanding their networks nationwide.

Mostly illiterate peasants unable to speak English, these intrepid fortune-hunters are lured to New York by friends and relatives already established there who arrange for the perilous trip by raft, or *yola*, from the DR to nearby Puerto Rico. There they receive bogus immigration papers, a permed hairdo and perhaps their first pair of shoes, and a plane ticket to New York. The aspiring traffickers start out under conditions akin to indentured servitude. Those who are successful enough to pay off their benefactors—and avoid arrest or addiction—

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A view from Washington

Nuclear Waste: Steady Progress to a Known Solution

Americans live in fast forward. We prize quick results and easy answers, fast food and instant gratification. I sometimes wonder if we are losing our capacity to understand and manage complex issues and difficult problems that demand steady, persistent, long-term attention.

This certainly seems to be true of nuclear waste.

I cannot count the number of people who have told me that they would gladly support construction of new nuclear power plants to meet our growing need for electricity...if only we knew what to do with the nuclear waste.

The fact is, we have known what to do with nuclear waste for over 30 years, long before the world's first nuclear power plant started up at Shippingport in Pennsylvania, in the late 1950s. We knew then that we would isolate the waste deep underground, in stable rock formations, locked away behind carefully engineered barriers, and monitored to ensure that radioactive material does not escape.

Thirty years of study and analysis have confirmed the wisdom of this approach. It is endorsed without question by leading independent scientific organizations around the world, including the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, the American Physical Society, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment. "There is no scientific or technical reason to think that a satisfactory geological repository cannot be built," said the National Academy of Sciences' National Research Council last year. "There is a strong worldwide consensus that the best, safest long-term option for dealing with high-level waste is geological isolation."

Where does the U.S. nuclear waste program stand? In 1987, Congress ordered the U.S. Department of Energy to conduct a comprehensive scientific evaluation of Yucca Mountain, a remote spot in the Nevada desert, as a possible site for safe, permanent nuclear waste disposal. Yucca Mountain seems to have the necessary requirements. It's isolated. The climate is arid. And the area seems geologically stable.

The Energy Department is conducting a massive scientific investigation of Yucca Mountain, which will determine whether it is a suitable site for nuclear waste disposal.

This may be the most comprehensive, careful and systematic assessment of a piece of real estate ever conducted. It will require 10 years of on-site and laboratory investigations and analyses, cost more than $4 billion, and involve some 500 scientists and engineers. And at every turn, the scientific work is monitored by independent agencies, including the National Academy of Sciences, the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board (an independent group of experts appointed by the President), the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency, the General Accounting Office and the state of Nevada.

If the scientists conclude that Yucca Mountain is suitable for nuclear waste disposal, we can all have complete confidence in that decision, and in the process that produced it.

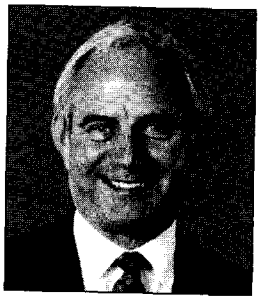
It is true that the U.S. nuclear waste program and the work of Yucca Mountain have experienced setbacks. The Energy Department did not have a permanent director for the program from 1987 until 1989, and this lack of leadership caused delays. The Department's choice of a contractor to manage the program day-to-day was challenged in court, which led to further delays. And the state of Nevada has delayed the scientific work at Yucca Mountain, by refusing to grant necessary permits.

Fortunately, the Energy Department program now has a permanent director and a prime contractor, and all the state's challenges have been struck down in court. The U.S. nuclear waste program is now firmly on the right track.

Let us remember that periodic setbacks are almost inevitable in any program as lengthy as this one. There will probably be occasional reversals in the years ahead, but ingenuity and persistence will overcome those, too.

Nuclear waste disposal is a serious undertaking. It deserves careful, methodical treatment. This is no place for quick and easy answers. You cannot see a glacier's movement with the naked eye, but that does not mean the glacier isn't moving. The process of evaluating possible sites for nuclear waste disposal is slow because it should be deliberate and careful. Progress will not always be visible from day to day, or even from year to year. But don't make the mistake of assuming there is no progress.

Phillip Bayne
President and CEO
U.S. Council for Energy Awareness



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often travel back and forth between the two countries, recruiting their own cheap labor and investing their outsized earnings in real estate, banks, discoteques, gas stations, bars, and car dealerships. And of course hundreds are jailed or killed and returned to be buried here, leaving half-finished estates overgrown by weeds.

The drug trade has affected more than just those who live in the sparkling mansions in the suburb known as "Villa Narco." Francisco Antonio Gaton, the local prosecutor, estimates that 60 percent of the local economy "somehow or other, through businesses abroad, through families, through banks, depends on drugs sold in New York." Nearly every family derives at least some benefit, he said. His efforts to investigate dealers have run up against hostility—sometimes neighbors have even stoned his home. "Many are afraid, but many are benefiting," he said, including judges and police. "The youths here have mistaken the young [traffickers] for heroes," Gaton added. "They see them with so much money, it makes these young kids want to take the same path."

Gaton's predecessor estimated in 1988 that as much as 80 percent of the city's youth were involved in the drug trade, whether trafficking or using or both. Consumption of marijuana and cocaine is becoming a serious problem, here and throughout the country. So is increasing violence. Young gangs, or *pandillas*, armed with pistols and machetes, are forming here along lines parallel to those in Upper Manhattan. "They try," Gaton said, "to implant here their same habits, their same businesses, the same culture they have in New York."

In the 1960s and early '70s, after the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo was assassinated and Lyndon Johnson sent in the Marines to suppress a leftist uprising, San Francisco de Macorís was a declining city with a burgeoning leftist political movement that came under heavy government repression. "San Francisco was a city that had few opportunities for the youth," said Rafael Guerrero Peralta, director of the Dominican Republic's anti-drug police. "Many youths who had little education immigrated to the United States, where they had opportunities to find work selling drugs and making money. Then they came home to recruit their friends and relatives." Government repression is not a problem for the dealers. They have become major contributors to political campaigns nationwide—one major dealer who was recently assassinated in New York was alleged to have contributed $6 million.

The Dominican Republic, like other Caribbean nations, is an important transshipment point for large quantities of cocaine in transit from Colombia to south Florida. Government agents, working with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, have destroyed thirty-five airstrips used in the business and jailed some of the more prominent traffickers. Most of the young street dealers in New York are not directly linked to these international transportation rings. Yet their success, and their habit of flaunting their riches, have created a stereotype here of well-dressed Dominicans who return home from New York as violent drug lords.

Like nearly all Dominican immigrants to New York—there are more than half a million—the young cocaine dealers typically send regular remittances to relatives back home. And a few dollars can go a very long way here. In the densely populated Barrio El Capotillo in Santo Domingo, for example, a typical, crumbling three-room apartment for a family of six in a back alley with tin roof, clapboard partitions, and an open sewer running past the front door rents for between 100 and 150 pesos a month, about $10. So $50 in the mail from a sister-in-law working as a seamstress in New York [illegible]ver rent for almost half a year. Needless to say, drug dealers make more than seamstresses.

Ruddy González, editor of the afternoon daily *Última Hora*, tells a story about his 23-year-old cousin in New York who once offered him $50,000 to help bring $1.2 million through the Santo Domingo airport. The money, the cousin said, could not be deposited in a bank in New York because it came from "the business." Gonzalez refused the offer, but another cousin accepted and later taunted him, "You just missed making $50,000."

Dominicans are struggling with 90 percent inflation and 30 percent unemployment; another 20 percent are underemployed. The average monthly salary for public employees is 1,000 pesos—about $80. The Dominican Republic's gross national product is about $2 billion annually. Remittances from relatives in New York, including drug dealers, are estimated at $600 to $800 million annually, making "Dominican Yorks" the nation's largest source of foreign currency.

Not far from San Francisco de Macorís is a farming town called Sabana Iglesias. In the late '60s this impoverished town was virtually abandoned. Nearly everyone left for New York. Many settled in Corona, Queens, where there is now a three-block neighborhood nicknamed "Savannah Church" that police have identified as, among other things, a flourishing heroin market. Today this rural village is doing nicely. There is a paved road, a disco, a liquor store, several well-stocked bodegas, and sturdy, clean, brightly painted houses inhabited by people like Casildo Rosario, 65, and his wife, Maria, 64. Both have sisters in New York who work as seamstresses and send periodic gifts of $30 or $50. But their neighbors seem to be getting much larger gifts. "I would say the majority of houses you see here, you can see that something comes from the help from New York," Rosario says. "One cannot build a nice house here just by farming and producing here."

Rosario's son, Nelsido, 20, is eager to make the move to New York. Nearly all of his friends have gone and found work in restaurants, grocery stores. "If I could go, I would, to help my parents," he says. "If you go with your mind set on working hard, you can go and come back without any problem." Not a few of his departed friends have gravitated toward dicier work, Nelsido concedes. One is in prison there. And during one period a couple of years ago, he said, it seemed as though a body was being returned home for burial almost weekly.

BILL BERKELEY is a writer based in New York.

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The Clarence Thomas Shakespeare festival.

MACBLUFF

By Barry G. Edelstein

"This is about love and hate and cheating and distrust and kindness and disgust and avarice and jealousy and envy." Joan Collins on the return of "Dynasty"? Geraldo on the Cheerleader Mom? Actually, it's Senator Alan Simpson of Wyoming describing the Clarence Thomas confirmation battle. Summing up this inventory in one phrase, he declaimed, "This is all Shakespeare."

Dusting off their copies of the *Complete Works* (of Bartlett if not of Shakespeare), members of the Judiciary Committee and their witnesses spoke the Bard's lines trippingly on the tongue. They quoted whole speeches and small fragments, summarized, paraphrased, and plagiarized. When the quotations weren't entirely inappropriate, they were just dumb. The ironies piled up faster than Coke cans outside the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

It was the context that foiled most of them. Simpson's recourse to *Othello* was one of the more incongruous. He intoned:

> Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
> Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
> Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something,
> nothing;
> 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands.
> But he that filches from me my good name
> Robs me of that which not enriches him
> And makes me poor indeed.

"What a tragedy!" he added, "What a disgusting tragedy!"

Midway through his dramatic reading, the senator admonished his audience to "Remember this scene!" Had he done so himself, Simpson would have realized that those lines are spoken by Iago, a white man who, although supposedly on Othello's side, plots to bring him down and eventually destroys him. A few scenes earlier this alienated psychopath exclaims twice, "I hate the Moor." (He also responds to the charge, "Thou art a villain" with, "You are a senator.") As if this weren't enough, remember that Othello is a black man who holds a high position in a white society, and who endures endless derision for marrying a white woman. No wonder Judge Thomas, along with every other literate American, sat there silent.

Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont offered this gem in the floor debate: "Judge Thomas doth protest too much." When Gertrude speaks this line in *Hamlet*, criticizing the Player Queen's excessive protestation, it's an ironic sign to the audience that she herself is guilty. Are you trying to tell us something, senator?

Senator Joseph Biden of Delaware, for his part, wrongly attributed to Shakespeare a quotation from the Restoration dramatist William Congreve. Questioning the first panel of pro-Thomas witnesses, Biden tried to find out whether "Professor Hill really was basically the woman scorned ... in the way that Shakespeare used the phrase, 'Hell hath no fury like ...'" Later that day Simpson set the chairman straight: "Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned / Nor hell a fury, like a woman scorned" (Congreve's *The Mourning Bride*). Biden admitted for the record that he was wrong, and joked, "Not that I think Mr. Congreve would ever plagiarize Shakespeare." Wrong again, senator. Congreve's works are crammed with borrowings from Shakespeare, none attributed. Consult Neil Kinnock.

But no one surpassed Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia. Arguing that Thomas was wrong to blame the process for his troubles, Byrd quoted Cassius and Edmund, who mock those who blame the stars for problems of their own making. It's unfortunate that both these characters are murderous manipulators and dead before their plays end, but context never slowed Byrd. His two hours' traffic of our Senate floor included references not only to *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear*, but also to the Bible (Genesis and Psalms), Milton's *Paradise Lost*, old English Law, the Constitution, Procopius, and *The Washington Post*. He even repeated Congreve's "woman scorned" tag, but at least he didn't attribute it to Joseph Biden.

The real tragedy was the missed opportunities. Had she testified, Angela Wright ("Bear my greeting to the senators and tell them that I will not come today") might have revealed this glimpse behind the closed doors of Thomas's office (from Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*):

> ... Sure he has got
> Some bawdy pictures ...
> The Friar and the Nun, or ...
> The boy of six year old, with the great thing.

Some may ask, "What's this but libeling against the senate?" Indeed, the legislators have far graver matters at hand than the incisive quoting of Shakespeare. But it remains true that "they have been at a great feast of languages, and stolen the scraps." And they missed the main course: the Clarence Thomas who actually exists in Shakespeare. A little ingenuity among Senate aides would have unearthed Thomas of Clarence, a younger brother of King Henry V. He has little of substance to say, of course. But that makes him all the more appropriate.

BARRY G. EDELSTEIN is a dramaturge at the New York Shakespeare Festival in Manhattan.

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The plot that failed.

ROUGH JUSTICE

By Abigail Thernstrom

The forces of political correctness have suffered their first major national defeat. Clarence Thomas was indeed the victim of an attempted "high-tech" lynching—but not by Anita Hill. She was just an unwitting tool for the nation's most organized thought police: the civil rights establishment, out to discredit any black whose ideas don't quite match its own. Smear campaigns are business as usual for the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and its allies. Thus the Thomas nomination triggered ugly rumors (wife beating, for instance) and an almost instant search for dirt.

The "back to segregated lunch counters" lie about Robert Bork should have alerted the American public to the left-liberals' capacity for dirty tricks. But Bork wasn't a made-for-television nominee, and civil rights spokesmen were still drawing on the moral capital they had accumulated in the 1960s. Certainly the media still believed that civil rights was above politics and that civil rights activists were spokesmen for our higher selves. And that was the message they successfully delivered to the American public.

They tried to do it this time around as well. And they would have succeeded had not Thomas himself come to the rescue. In the first set of hearings the packaging provided by White House handlers obscured the man his friends and admirers knew. (I met him once and found him to be immensely articulate and forceful.) In the second round, he threw off the wrapping and emerged as a person whom the majority of Americans came to trust and like—and I recognized.

President Bush has suggested that the harassment hearings should have been behind closed doors. Behind closed doors, Thomas would have lost. The story, filtered through the media, would have had a Nina Totenberg spin. Congress, it is said, was the big loser in the Thomas affair. Wrong. It is the press that has been truly discredited. The press and those upon whom they relied to teach us the "truth": militant feminists such as law professor Catharine MacKinnon and out-of-touch black "leaders" such as Roger Wilkins.

The highly visible MacKinnon was on her best behavior during the hearings. In more unguarded moments she talks of prostitution, marriage, and sexual harassment as indistinguishable. But even her cleaned-up act didn't have much appeal. In fact, the more "experts" the media called, the less convincing Hill's case became. Given half a chance, the people (at home and abroad) look, listen, and draw their own conclusions. For forty years the state-controlled press in Eastern Europe fed the citizens nothing but Communist garbage, and almost no one believed a word. All during the New Deal a large majority of the nation's press opposed FDR, yet the president was overwhelmingly popular. In the Thomas affair, neither the biased major networks nor NPR nor *The New York Times* turned out to have much impact.

The press doesn't give up easily, however. Polls show that most viewers thought Arlen Specter did a good job; they thought wrong, liberal columnists are now saying. The Republicans, they argue, launched a vicious attack on Anita Hill, while the Democrats were just their usual sweet (and thus incompetent) selves. No one asked Thomas about his alleged private tastes—in porn movies and the like—the complaint runs. Evidently a nominee's private life becomes a matter of legitimate scrutiny once some mud is flung. Evidently, too, to question a woman sharply is just another form of male harassment. Women, it seems, truly are the weaker sex.

Perhaps it's because women are perceived as the weaker sex that a remarkable number of otherwise intelligent people seem to believe that Hill must have been telling at least a partial truth—that she was indeed his victim. Would they be so convinced if he were white? As Thomas pointed out, the belief that black men ... well, you know, they can't help themselves, runs deep. In fact, her case was remarkably weak. She canceled the appearance of all but four witnesses, and they could testify only that *she* said something had happened. No one could say anything actually did occur. And Hill was unable to locate a single person from either the Department of Education or the EEOC who could draw a portrait of him that squared even minimally with hers. Moreover, she was unwilling to reappear for cross-examination at the hearings on Monday or to answer questions from the press.

But why would she come forth with an untrue story? We don't know enough about Anita Hill to answer that question. Thomas has been in the public eye for more than a decade; Hill is an unknown figure. Basic facts are not clear. Was she fired from her first job, or was she not, and if so, why? Are her politics as stereotypically conservative as claimed? Why did she—an ambitious Yale Law School graduate—accept a first teaching job at an unaccredited school? Hill remains an enigma.

The National Organization for Women and Democratic activists such as Ann Lewis have threatened to punish those senators who voted for Thomas. But American women supported the nominee almost 2-to-1, polls showed. The black leadership, too, has been exposed as politically impotent; the NAACP speaks for very few.

Should Republicans gloat and Democrats weep? Not at all. The Democratic Party will begin to regain its strength when it severs its link to these off-putting groups. And a more conservative Supreme Court may be a gift to the liberal cause. For two reasons. One, the judicial rulings that liberals love in fact swelled Republican ranks. The Court's activism on behalf of prisoners, pornographers, and the like drove Democrats from the party. And two, Republicans have much to fear from an

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overturned *Roe* v. *Wade*. The president's pro-life position will lose his party votes once the issue returns to the political arena. Liberal lobbyists did everything they could to stop the Thomas confirmation. Their actions were morally despicable, and their political judgment was deeply flawed.

ABIGAIL THERNSTROM is the author of *Whose Votes Count? Affirmative Action and Minority Voting Rights* (Harvard University Press, 1987).

The PLO's revolt peters out.

INTAFADING

By Ehud Ya'ari

When Palestinians look around them these days, as the fourth year of the intifada draws to a close, what they see is largely a picture of gloom and doom. Despite having made enormous sacrifices and suffered severe disruption in their lives, many feel they have precious little to show for it. They are no closer to divesting themselves of Israeli rule. On the contrary, there are far more Israelis living in the occupied territories now than there were at the start of the uprising (some 30,000 new housing units have been added in the interim). There are also hundreds of thousands more Jews in Israel than there were at the close of 1987. The Jewish state has learned to live with the intifada as though it were a case of asthma or arthritis.

Palestinian suffering increased dramatically after the Gulf war. Some 300,000 Palestinians have been "transferred" out of Kuwait into an impoverished Jordan. The PLO lost its last bases in Lebanon, and the early gains of the intifada have been squandered. The United States suspended its dialogue with the PLO, and even the Arab countries concede that it needn't be included in the peace process. Meanwhile, in recent months more Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have been killed by their compatriots, as alleged collaborators, than by Israeli gunfire. The Palestinian standard of living has plummeted, the rate of employment is around 25 percent, and many families, having literally consumed their savings, are on the brink of starvation. It is not surprising, perhaps, that polls taken in the territories show the population divided almost equally between those in favor of continuing the uprising, as the only form of pressure that can be applied to Israel, and those in favor of ending it, as it has harmed the Palestinians more than the Israelis.

The Palestinian plight is all the more dismaying now because the uprising's ostensible alternative, the "armed struggle," has proved bankrupt. The terrorist attacks and incursions over Israel's borders, standard fare in the 1970s, brought reprisals and in no way hastened the end of the occupation. International terrorism earned only hostility for the Palestinian cause. Even were the PLO to contemplate a renewal of armed operations, there's no money to fund them. The "armed struggle" has been reduced to the empty slogan of diehard radicals.

One result of the intifada's disappointing achievements is a dramatic erosion in the authority of the Palestinian leadership—to the point where there's a scent of anarchy in the air. Not only are Yasir Arafat's orders blatantly ignored, but in a recent flurry of leaflets he has come under attack for trying to run the intifada "from thousands of miles away by telephone and fax." The PLO is plagued by fragmentation (which extends to each of its constituent factions) and by the rise of maverick "warlords," raising legitimate concern that the response to the peace conference in the territories will fall somewhere between sporadic bloodshed and a full-scale bloodbath.

George Habash's Popular Front has sworn to take up arms against anyone who works toward a negotiated settlement, as have the conservative wing of Naif Hawatmeh's Democratic Front and all six factions of the Islamic Jihad. Even within the mainstream Fatah, a number of elite cadres—such as Force 17 and the Western Sector—are opposed to the pragmatic approach. Adding to the confusion is a spate of contradictory peace plans, most of which depart from the official Arafat line, and the debate going on in the East Jerusalem press between the advocates of joining in negotiations, even under "humiliating conditions," and opponents who charge that doing so will constitute a "historic capitulation."

The change in the intifada has not come about abruptly. In essence the uprising reached a plateau about two years ago and has been caught in limbo ever since, unable to generate new momentum but never winding down to the point of actual extinction. A minority of Palestinians, disappointed with the intifada's lack of success, have used this opportunity to renege on any promises of unarmed violence; there's been an ominous rise in the number of incidents involving the use of firearms (including grenades and explosive devices) against soldiers and civilians alike. But the majority of Palestinians in the territories want life to return to normal (or as normal as it can be under the circumstances), and the beginnings of a backlash can be seen—against both the intifada and the despondency it has spawned. The marks of the change vary from a campaign by the residents of Gaza to clean up the beach (which has been strewn with junk and garbage for much of the uprising) to merchants keeping their shops open beyond the hours permitted by the Unified National Command. During the matriculation exams on the West Bank, parents stood guard outside the schools to prevent masked youngsters from organizing mass cheating or otherwise disrupting the procedures. A number of East Jerusalem restaurants that

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had closed during the height of the rebellion have reopened for business, and the Palestinian papers are again running ads for luxury items and singers to entertain at weddings—both of which were considered bad form by the austere code of the uprising.

Aptly enough, a parallel situation has existed on the Israeli side. After the first two years the Israel Defense Forces exhausted their potential to "pacify" the uprising, by means ranging from the mass arrest of activists to punishing economic pressures, and had never really been capable of crushing it altogether. Alert to the new Palestinian swing toward moderation, the Israeli authorities have tried to respond in kind with a mixture of economic incentives (tax exemptions for investors and lifting the restrictions on the amount of money that can be brought in from Jordan) and political signals: waiving security checks at the Jordan bridges, easing the censorship of opinion columns, and even allowing officers of the Civil Administration (which ostensibly governs life in the territories) to hold wide-ranging "dialogues" with Palestinians who had earlier been regarded as "untouchables." Efforts have also been made (with limited success) to soften the treatment of laborers passing through military checkpoints into Israel, a belated recognition that the humiliation of the Palestinians, more than their nationalist fervor, was the match that ignited the intifada.

In the consequent standoff, both sides seem resigned to a state of grudging coexistence. Much of day-to-day life revolves around a set of "gentlemen's agreements." The IDF, for example, will refrain from entering a village while a parade of masked youths is in progress (replete, as of late, with displays of arms and shooting in the air); the Palestinians reciprocate by failing to mount resistance when military units move onto their turf. The army has also tried to modulate the response of its men to such provocations as stone throwing, while on the Palestinian side a number of leaders of Fatah's semiclandestine organization have launched a public campaign to get the masked youths off the streets.

Beyond these efforts to reduce the level of violence, however, lies a more compelling political reality: the de facto state of "dual government" prevailing in the territories. Though unable to boast of "liberated areas" per se, the Palestinians have already achieved considerable control over the governance of their lives in the form of a "runaway autonomy." This embryonic self-rule finds expression not only in an alternative source of authority that dictates its own values and norms of behavior, but even more cogently in the bands of young people, subordinate to the local leadership or to commanders over the border, who function like a primitive gendarmerie. They fight both Palestinian crime and the network of Israeli security agents. They collect "taxes" and "donations," hold trials, and see to the distribution of political literature on an unprecedented scale. Israeli rule asserts itself only where and when the IDF fields a military force. And since the army cannot be everywhere at all times—and is in fact not present in most places during most hours—"autonomous" Palestinian factors rush in to fill the vacuum. Thus it is the extent of this "runaway autonomy," rather than the index of violence, that is the true gauge of where the intifada stands.

As to where it is heading, perhaps the most telling indication is the effort to forge institutions that will harness this "runaway autonomy" and enable the Palestinians to "invest the gains" (a common phrase in the territories) made by their uprising in the emergent political process. Though few speak of it openly, what the leadership in the territories has in mind is an ambitious plan to convene the equivalent of a constituent assembly that will eventually serve as a counterweight to the Palestinian National Council and, formally speaking, as the principal of the Palestinian delegation to the peace conference. On the drawing board is the creation of a 200-member Higher Council for Planning, a local parliament that will dictate policy to the PLO abroad. In effect, the elections now being held for various unions and associations in the territories (with Israel's acquiescence) are the groundwork for implementing this plan. If it succeeds, the Palestinians in the territories will finally be able to offer Israel a bona fide "address" for political intercourse, be it an informal dialogue or full-fledged peace talks. And the PLO, with its tanks rotting in South Yemen, most of its military troops in the Libyan desert, and corps of officers deserting to Western European countries, will be able to do very little about the situation.

The plan's success depends not only on the Palestinians' disposition toward the idea but, ironically, upon Israel's willingness to let it proceed. In fact, for the first time, Israel effectively has the ability to decide the internal struggle for control of the PLO. By making life easier for the local pragmatists, it can increase their chances of taking over the organization. Simply allowing Palestinians from the territories to attend the Palestinian National Council meeting in Algiers last month, for example, would have changed the balance of forces in the PLO overnight.

However, there has long been a strong convergence of interests between the Israeli government and the PLO in Tunis. Just as both worked against the intifada's Unified National Command during the heyday of the rebellion, so they are now trying to stop the Palestinians in the territories from translating their hard-earned leverage into real political power. The Israelis say they want to talk to "another leadership" but have consistently blocked its emergence, thus maneuvering themselves into a position where the only people they can talk to are proxies who refer them back to Tunis. At the bilateral negotiations scheduled to start following the Madrid conference, the Israelis will have to decide whether they would like to do business in earnest with Faisal al-Husseini, the most outstanding Palestinian leader in the territories, or only with Yasir Arafat's errand boys. Shamir is convinced that given enough pressure, the two leaders will do each other in. Such confidence may be misplaced, but given the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it seems as good a bet as any.

EHUD YA'ARI is the chief Middle East correspondent for Israeli Television.

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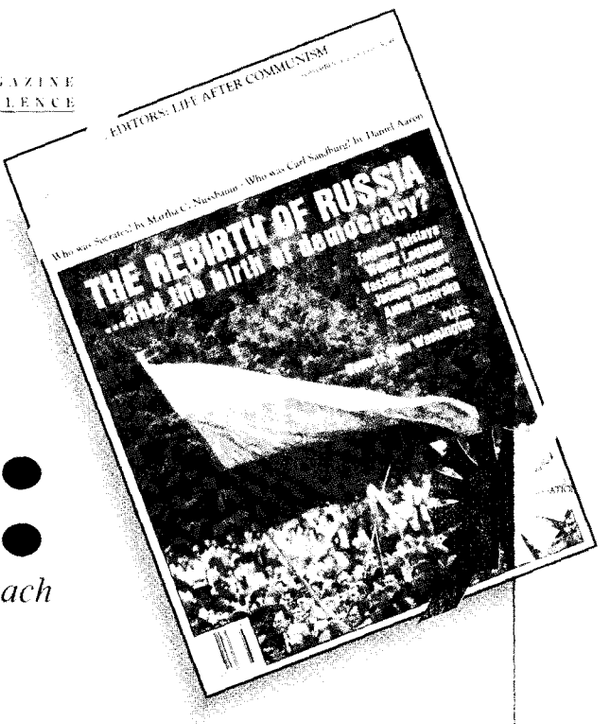

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Russia's David Duke.

FLYING CIRCUS

By Paul Quinn-Judge

VOLGOGRAD

The deeper the former Soviet republics sink into economic collapse and regional conflict, Vladimir Zhirinovsky says, the better are his chances of political success. Zhirinovsky heads the Liberal Democratic Party, a political organization that is neither liberal nor democratic. He stands for authoritarian rule, a mighty Russia, a powerful political police, and a strong army. The only problem he has with last August's failed coup is that it was led by idiots.

Last June, when he ran for the Russian presidency, his call for the re-forming of Cossack cavalry units and his promise of cheap vodka were treated as light relief. Then he won 6 million votes, and political commentators stopped grinning. Now he is running for the Soviet presidency, an election theoretically scheduled for sometime in the first half of next year.

His chances of being elected are slim—not least because the Soviet presidency may soon be a historical footnote. But his prospects for influence in Russian politics are getting better all the time. Zhirinovsky is counting on hunger, violence, and instability this winter. "Hungry people will vote for me," he tells an audience in Volgograd. So will the Russian refugees forced out of the Baltics by new citizenship laws, or fleeing from local wars in the Caucasus, he adds.

"In a rich country my program would not go down well," he tells one meeting with disarming frankness. "But in a poor, embittered country like Russia this is my golden hour." Sixty percent of the population believes that major armed conflicts between republics are likely in the course of the next decade, according to a recent poll in *Moscow News*. Frustration is growing with Boris Yeltsin's inactivity and with the infighting among his staff.

Zhirinovsky is now criss-crossing the country, putting out his message of xenophobia and apocalypse. Traveling with him is a bizarre excursion into a very black, very Russian version of Monty Python. He works on a shoestring and his organization is minimal. In Volgograd, for example, his hosts were "South Russia," a newly formed ultranationalist youth group. As organizers they were disastrous. Meetings failed to materialize, leaving the organizers squabbling loudly among themselves about who was to blame—"Spridonov, you're a class-A cretin."

Their political views, however, are more sinister. Like the skinheads who have been attacking immigrant hostels in Germany, South Russia activists are mostly young and male, predominantly though not exclusively blue-collar workers. Like their German counterparts, they worry about the future of "European civilization." They also express concern about the "Jewish question."

The candidate's own entourage consists of two people: his press secretary, Andrey Arkhipov, earnest and given to repeating that the main aim of Zhirinovsky's party is "to preserve White civilization"; and Igor—his bodyguard, batman, and party organizer for the Moscow region. A hulking former car mechanic, Igor lumbers alongside Zhirinovsky, bent under the weight of an enormous backpack crammed with campaign literature. Zhirinovsky is invariably dressed in a gray pin-striped suit that has seen better days, and yellow shoes. He swings a rolled umbrella as he walks.

Zhirinovsky's usual tone of address with Igor is the bellow. Before his first press conference in Volgograd, our South Russia hosts took us to a flyblown self-service restaurant for lunch. Igor was instructed to get the food. "Not in your hands, bring the bread on a plate, a plate," Zhirinovsky yelled across the restaurant. "And we need forks, soup, salad, juice...." Igor, bewildered by the rapid burst of instructions, slowly rotated on his axis until a South Russia activist came to his aid.

During the press conference, Igor handed out party literature, offering enthusiastic comments about his favorite pamphlets. The scrum that gathered around him threatened to drown out the speaker. Zhirinovsky stopped in midsentence and screamed at Igor. "Don't stand there like Father Christmas. Sit down and shut up. You can hand the rest out later." Igor appeared to take this well.

Between meetings Zhirinovsky is quiet, almost sullen. He stares into space, shrugging off questions about his policies. But as the time for a meeting approaches, he slowly cranks up. As you listen to him it becomes clear that he is counting on Russia repeating the collapse of the Weimar Republic. Though he expresses mild hurt when people compare him to Hitler, his political rhetoric sounds very much like the National Socialists in the early '30s.

He has, for example, dusted off an updated stab-in-the-back theory. Russia was reduced to its present state of degradation by the treachery of the present leadership, he says. They are carrying out the instructions of "the international center"—by which he apparently means the leaders of the United States and the West.

The West fears a powerful Russia, and every thirty to forty years takes steps to weaken it, he likes to tell his listeners. In 1917 they infected Russia with Bolshevism, he says. Then came World War II. Then, he says, they finished us off with perestroika. After that he moves to the racial question. The country is under threat from all sides, he tells his audience. From the East comes the "yellow peril" (*zheltaya opasnost*), he says. From the South, hundreds of millions of Muslims are massing on Russia's borders.

Then comes the promise of restoration of Russia's

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greatness. The country will once again be defined by its pre-August boundaries, by economic sanctions if possible, by force of arms if necessary, he declares. The Caucasus will be pacified, a governor general will rule the reabsorbed Baltic states. The army and the secret police will be powerful again. To achieve this, he says, the country needs to swallow "bitter medicine": a limited period of authoritarian rule, the suspension of political parties, and direct presidential rule.

His message is crude and violent, but it is targeting the fears and nightmares of some of the most vulnerable segments of the Russian population. Many blue-collar workers voted for Yeltsin last June not because he was the standard-bearer of democracy but because he was a good *muzhik* who would restore order and do away with speculation. Instead, order has collapsed and speculation is flourishing.

Zhirinovsky is appealing to the millions of workers in the defense industries, and the hundreds of thousands of officers whose futures are now in doubt as the country prepares sweeping cuts in the armed forces. And the rough forcefulness of his message also seems to strike a chord among people irritated by Gorbachev's windiness and disillusioned by Yeltsin's inaction. "It's either me or civil war," he kept repeating to his listeners in Volgograd. After he concluded his press conference with these words, a bunch of young Russian journalists flocked to the speaker's table. They wanted his autograph.

PAUL QUINN-JUDGE is Moscow correspondent of *The Boston Globe.*

Nirvana in New York.

HELLO DALAI

By Jim Holt

"The Andes llama, he's a beast / The Tibet lama, he's a priest." And the Dalai Lama, he's the *ocean priest* (for such is the literal meaning of the title in Mongol)—oceanic in the breadth of his learning, the depth of his wisdom. If you do not believe it, just ask Richard Gere.

Gere is the Dalai Lama's most visible disciple in this country and acted as celebrity liaison during His Holiness's recent two-week visit to New York as part of the worldwide "Year of Tibet." At times the actor, whose fundament is almost as familiar to moviegoers as his face, overshadowed the Protector of the Land of Snows. A brief appearance that the two made in the financial district caused a terrific stir, but I fear for the wrong reasons. "Who's Billy Lama?" I overheard one secretary ask another.

At the time I was only marginally better informed. I knew that the Dalai Lama was the spiritual and—until he was chased over the Himalayas into Indian exile by Communist Chinese troops in 1959—the temporal leader of Tibet. I knew that he had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his doughty opposition to the Beijing regime, which is responsible for the deaths of up to 1.2 million of his people (who now number 6 million) and the destruction of over 6,000 Buddhist monasteries.

Beyond that, I was a little foggy. Although I vaguely recall taking a course on Buddhism in college, I do not believe I was ever acquainted with the theological identity of the Dalai Lama. During his visit here I filled that lacuna by attending several of his addresses, reading diligently, and engaging in disputations with various adepts. One of the most striking things I learned was that the Dalai Lama has existed more or less continuously for six centuries, occupying a series of different bodies. The trick is reincarnation, a central tenet of Tibetan Buddhism. All the historical Dalai Lamas are held to be manifestations of a single bodhisattva ("Buddha-to-be") called Avalokitesvara, the Lord of Compassion. Admittedly, his personality is subject to some variation from rebirth to rebirth; although many in the line have evinced great piety, the sixth Dalai Lama, who lived from 1683 to 1706, was a notorious libertine and writer of romantic verse.

Tenzin Gyatso, the incumbent and fourteenth Dalai Lama, was born in 1935. How, one is keen to know, was he singled out as the latest manifestation of the Lord of Compassion? That is a curious story. Four years after the thirteenth Dalai Lama died in 1933, the quest to find the new incarnation commenced, the candidates all being Tibetan boys born from forty-nine days to two years after his demise. A dozen omens—including a rotating corpse, a vision in the waters of a sacred lake, a portentous configuration of clouds, and possibly a moving star—led the search party to the home of a provincial peasant couple. Their 2-year-old son was shown a collection of objects, some of which had belonged to the previous incarnation. He immediately grabbed a little case, exclaiming, "My teeth are in there." Inside, the amazed monks discovered a set of the former Dalai Lama's dentures. So the lore goes; although there were not any skeptical witnesses present, I have no cause to doubt it. At the age of 4 the child was installed on the Lion Throne in the holy capital city of Llasa, there residing alone except for his eldest brother in the magnificent 1,000-chambered Potala palace.

This seems a somewhat loopy method of choosing the God-King of Tibet, although it does compare favorably with our own process for, say, coming up with new Supreme Court justices. But did they get the right guy? This was a question that occurred to me when I went to hear the Dalai Lama discourse on the subject of

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"Global Responsibility through Compassion" at Madison Square Garden one Sunday evening during his visit here. En route I stopped off at one of my favorite Hell's Kitchen spots, the Wee Molly Pub, in order to purge myself of any cynical impulses and become an empty vessel into which the Holder of the White Lotus could pour the distillate of his vision.

The event attracted a sellout crowd consisting of the sorts of people one would be likely to see at a Truffaut film. Presently a blow-dried fellow in a suit took the stage, which was adorned with Tibetan tapestries and a pagodalike structure called a mandala house, and described the rigorous scholarly training the Dalai Lama had undergone. At length the Dalai Lama himself appeared. An impish, endlessly grinning man in tinted spectacles, he was attired in scarlet and saffron monastic robes beneath which could be discerned a pair of brown oxfords. "He's so cute!" exclaimed the woman behind me. And indeed he was. On hand to greet His Holiness was David Dinkins, who was presented with a flowing white scarf. After much exchanging of prayerlike gestures with the mayor to great applause, the Living Buddha seated himself in a Chippendale chair next to a large vase of flowers and started to address the rapt audience in fairly wonky English, punctuated by much giggling and occasional admissions that he had "forgotten the point." He spoke so slowly that I was able to write down every word he said.

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

"From the moment of birth, all human being want happiness," he began (apparently ignorant of Nietzsche's observation that, strictly speaking, this is only true of the English). But because of the Industrial Revolution, all nations are interdependent. "In order to develop your own country, you need something from other side, other side," but to obtain it by force is "not nice." Fortunately, the desire for peace today is "very strong, very strong." If all the nations of the world relinquish their weapons, we will have "enormous extra money that can be used in positive fields like solving starvation and the AIDS problems." When the brilliant scientists now busy perfecting engines of destruction turn their attention to such constructive work "they should be given double pay." The key to it all is building up a critical mass of compassion. Fortunately this should not be too difficult, as "the dominant force in our mind is affection." We humans are "much closer to deer than to tiger." Once we realize this and become more affectionate, "we will sleep better and not need alcohol." I thought wistfully of the Wee Molly.

Judging from the applause, the audience found it a thumping good stuff. They particularly warmed to his theme that "one religion cannot satisfy all humanity, so a variety of religions better—a supermarket of religions." But I found this apparent tolerance toward Western religion a trifle condescending, especially when he added that he "was not talking about nirvana—at that level there are differences." Politically, the Dalai Lama's message was oddly quietistic. "If you cultivate inner serenity," we were told, "the external environment cannot harm you." What about the long-suffering people of Tibet, someone in the audience wanted to know. How can we help them? "We'll talk about that some other time," was the response.

I came away from this event thinking that the Dalai Lama was a bit of a holy bore, if not a fraud. "Saints should always be judged guilty until they are proven innocent," wrote George Orwell apropos of Gandhi, and the Living Buddha is no exception. In his defense, votaries I spoke to hymned his "reality," his "rapport with existence," his "self-effacing humanity." Traveling around the world from conference to conference, he never flies first class. ("The only advantage of first class is you get free drinks," he said, "and I don't drink.") When asked once what he missed most about Tibet, he replied, "Yaks." He is reputedly happiest puttering around his garden and tinkering with mechanical gadgets. "I am a simple Buddhist monk," he declared on receiving his Nobel Prize. "No more, no less." Can one not help

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Women in the Workplace

BY ALBERT SHANKER, PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

Americans are big believers in the importance of education. We like to believe, too, that educational achievement is rewarded with better jobs and higher pay. Unfortunately, there is plenty of evidence that the opposite often is true in the American workplace.

We already know that employers do not reward, and therefore do not encourage, achievement among kids who go directly from high school to work. They don't ask for high school transcripts; they don't favor graduates who have worked hard and performed well; a high school diploma is enough. But it turns out that employers' indifference toward achievement does not stop with high school graduates. A recent study from the U.S. Department of Education reports that they are doing exactly the same thing with our highest achieving college graduates: women.

In "Women at Thirtysomething: Paradoxes of Attainment," Clifford Adelman finds that American women have not only achieved equality of educational opportunity with men; they now also surpass men in academic achievement all along the line. But—and this is the shocker—employers continue to pay women less than men even when they are doing the same jobs and when the men are less qualified. This is evidence that gross inequity toward women persists; it also sends a terrible message to *all* of our students: Working hard and achieving do not pay off.

Adelman bases his conclusions on a national study that followed the school and work experiences of 26,600 members of the high school class of 1972 until they were in their early thirties. Here are some of his findings:

- In high school, young women achieved at a higher level than young men. And this is not because they stuck to "easy" subjects: If you compare male and female students who took the same number of courses in mathematics and science, the women, on average, did significantly better than the men.
- Parents had bigger ambitions for their sons than for their daughters, and the daughters apparently reflected this in their own ideas about what they would do after high school. Nevertheless, a higher percentage of women from the high school class of 1972 entered college directly from high school than men, and a higher percentage won scholarships.
- Once in college, these women were more successful academically than men no matter what field they studied. Women majoring in fields that are traditionally considered male preserves—science, business and engineering—did especially well in comparison with their male classmates.
- Success in college apparently led these women to revise their educational aspirations upward. By the time they received their bachelor's degrees, more young women than men aspired to graduate degrees. And the ones who went on to graduate school were better qualified, too. Forty-four percent of them had grade point averages of A- or better in comparison with 35 percent of the men.

But the job market did not reward this achievement—far from it. The women suffered more unemployment and underemployment than the men, and their earnings were far lower: In 1985, the average salary for a woman with a bachelor's degree was $18,670; for a man, it was $27,606.

Perhaps it's no surprise to find that many women earned less than men because they had taken low-paying jobs traditionally done by women, like nursing and teaching. But even when Adelman compares men and women who had the same undergraduate backgrounds and the same number of years of job experience—in other words, he didn't include women with children in this comparison—the differences between what they earned was disgraceful. For example, the men who majored in foreign languages earned 54 percent more than the women, and the men who majored in education earned 26 percent more than the women.

There are a few occupations, including chemist, economist and computer programmer, in which the pay for women, on average, actually surpassed the pay for men. And there are some others in which there was little difference. But for the most part, the pay differences in favor of men were shocking, ranging from 15 percent for pharmacists to 77 percent for architects.

This system of rewarding–or, rather, not rewarding–our hardworking young women is unjust; it's also stupid.

This system of rewarding—or, rather, not rewarding—our hardworking young women is unjust; it's also stupid. Employers talk a lot about the productivity of the U.S. workforce. They talk about the serious shortage of math and science graduates and how it's going to damage our country's prosperity. And yet, how do they treat well-trained and highly motivated workers? Worse than those who are less qualified.

Adelman says American women are the best educated in the world. They are a tremendous resource, but employers are squandering this resource by failing to recognize it. How long will it be before women ask, "Why should we be chumps? Why should we bother to work hard? It certainly isn't getting us anywhere."

If employers want talented and dedicated workers, they'd better stop talking about it and start rewarding merit.

To order "Women at Thirtysomething," send $4.25 to Supt. of Documents, U.S. Gov't. Printing Office, DC 20402, and ask for #065-000-00451-8.

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detecting a trace of vanity behind such professions?

I could not—at least until an epiphany I experienced a week later. It took place in a glade just north of Sheep Meadow in Central Park. I had gone there to attend a sunrise meditation conducted by the Dalai Lama toward the end of his visit. Having earlier left a cacophonous club called the Sound Factory in the not-so-small hours, I felt a quiet meditative moment was just the thing to launch the new day. It was a morning of unexampled beauty, chill and clear; the sky was just beginning to lighten into bluish-orange hues as I entered the park. Perched on boulders surrounding the designated spot were little clutches of Buddhist monks droning away on Tibetan wind instruments (one of which had the sonic heft of the horn of the *QE II*); they were illumined in a strobelike way by the flash of cameras. A thousand or so people, many wrapped in blankets, were gathered there in the predawn darkness silently awaiting the Dalai Lama. The scene was—and I use the word guardedly—surreal. I felt very spiritual just being up at that hour.

Before long His Holiness arrived. Without a word he assumed what I took to be a lotus position on an ornate cushioned platform surrounded by candles, and everyone in the crowd adopted a like posture. Having neglected to bring my own blanket, I was annoyed to discover that the ground was damp. What was going to happen next? I wondered. Well, we sat there. And sat there. The near-perfect hush was spoiled only by the occasional rasp of a police walkie-talkie. (This sort of quiet makes one nervous in New York, as it seems to beg for a screaming maniac to shatter it.) Forty minutes or so into the meditation, time went logarithmic on me. I was freezing, and had to go to the bathroom. I tried to meditate on the essential nature of cold as merely slow-moving molecules. I endeavored to focus on the precise phenomenological qualities of the sensations emanating from my cramped legs, hoping thereby to strip those sensations of their painfulness. But I'm afraid it was futile.

After what seemed an eternity—actually only an hour—His Holiness stirred at last. Extracting a handkerchief from his robes, he blew his nose and smiled. I do not know whether I can convey this, but it was an utterly numinous gesture. Momentarily I seemed to see the shining face of a bodhisattva in this childlike little man. My intense discomfort was at an end. So, happily, was the meditation. The Dalai Lama departed as silently as he had come, and we happy enlightened few made our way out of the park in the dawn light.

I hailed a cab on Central Park West. As I got in, the cabbie asked me what so many people were doing in the park so early on a cold Sunday morning. I told him they had come to meditate with the Dalai Lama.

"No kidding," he said. "Was Richard Gere there?"

JIM HOLT is the New York columnist for the *Literary Review* (London).

The 'black music' that isn't either.

THE RAP ON RAP

By David Samuels

This summer Soundscan, a computerized scanning system, changed *Billboard* magazine's method of counting record sales in the United States. Replacing a haphazard system that relied on big-city record stores, Soundscan measured the number of records sold nationally by scanning the bar codes at chain store cash registers. Within weeks the number of computed record sales leapt, as demographics shifted from minority-focused urban centers to white, suburban, middle-class malls. So it was that America awoke on June 22, 1991, to find that its favorite record was not *Out of Time*, by aging college-boy rockers R.E.M., but *Niggaz4life*, a musical celebration of gang rape and other violence by N.W.A., or Niggers With Attitude, a rap group from the Los Angeles ghetto of Compton whose records had never before risen above No. 27 on the Billboard charts.

From *Niggaz4life* to *Boyz N the Hood*, young black men committing acts of violence were available this summer in a wide variety of entertainment formats. Of these none is more popular than rap. And none has received quite the level of critical attention and concern. Writers on the left have long viewed rap as the heartbeat of urban America, its authors, in Arthur Kempton's words, "the pre-eminent young dramaturgists in the clamorous theater of the street." On the right, this assumption has been shared, but greeted with predictable disdain.

Neither side of the debate has been prepared, how-

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ever, to confront what the entertainment industry's receipts from this summer prove beyond doubt: although rap is still proportionally more popular among blacks, its primary audience is white and lives in the suburbs. And the history of rap's degeneration from insurgent black street music to mainstream pop points to another dispiriting conclusion: the more rappers were packaged as violent black criminals, the bigger their white audiences became.

If the racial makeup of rap's audience has been largely misunderstood, so have the origins of its authors. Since the early 1980s a tightly knit group of mostly young, middle-class, black New Yorkers, in close concert with white record producers, executives, and publicists, has been making rap music for an audience that industry executives concede is primarily composed of white suburban males. Building upon a form pioneered by lower-class black artists in New York between 1975 and 1983, despite an effective boycott of the music by both black and white radio that continues to this day, they created the most influential pop music of the 1980s. Rap's appeal to whites rested in its evocation of an age-old image of blackness: a foreign, sexually charged, and criminal underworld against which the norms of white society are defined, and, by extension, through which they may be defied. It was the truth of this latter proposition that rap would test in its journey into the mainstream.

"Hip-hop," the music behind the lyrics, which are "rapped," is a form of sonic bricolage with roots in "toasting," a style of making music by speaking over records. (For simplicity, I'll use the term "rap" interchangeably with "hip-hop" throughout this article.) Toasting first took hold in Jamaica in the mid-1960s, a response, legend has it, to the limited availability of expensive Western instruments and the concurrent proliferation of cheap R&B instrumental singles on Memphis-based labels such as Stax-Volt. Cool DJ Herc, a Jamaican who settled in the South Bronx, is widely credited with having brought toasting to New York City. Rap spread quickly through New York's poor black neighborhoods in the mid- and late 1970s. Jams were held in local playgrounds, parks, and community centers, in the South and North Bronx, Brooklyn, and Harlem.

Although much is made of rap as a kind of urban streetgeist, early rap had a more basic function: dance music. Bill Stephney, considered by many to be the smartest man in the rap business, recalls the first time he heard hip-hop: "The point wasn't rapping, it was rhythm, DJs cutting records left and right, taking the big drum break from Led Zeppelin's 'When the Levee Breaks,' mixing it together with 'Ring My Bell,' then with a Bob James Mardi Gras jazz record and some James Brown. You'd have 2,000 kids in any community center in New York, moving back and forth, back and forth, like some kind of tribal war dance, you might say. It was the rapper's role to match this intensity rhythmically. No one knew what he was saying. He was just rocking the mike."

Rap quickly spread from New York to Philadelphia, Chicago, Boston, and other cities with substantial black populations. Its popularity was sustained by the ease with which it could be made. The music on early rap records sounded like the black music of the day: funk or, more often, disco. Performers were unsophisticated about image and presentation, tending toward gold lamé jumpsuits and Jericurls, a second-rate appropriation of the stylings of funk musicians like George Clinton and Bootsy Collins.

The first rap record to make it big was "Rapper's Delight," released in 1979 by the Sugar Hill Gang, an ad hoc all-star team drawn from three New York groups on Sylvia and Joey Robinson's Sugar Hill label. Thanks to Sylvia Robinson's soul music and background, the first thirty seconds of "Rapper's Delight" were indistinguishable from the disco records of the day: light guitars, high-hat drumming, and handclaps over a deep funk bass line. What followed will be immediately familiar to anyone who was young in New York City that summer:

> I said, hip-hop, de-hibby, de-hibby-dibby,
> Hip-hip-hop you don't stop.
> Rock it out, Baby Bubba to the boogie de-bang-bang,
> Boogie to the boogie to be.
> Now what you hear is not a test,
> I'm rapping to the beat ...
> I said, "By the way, baby, what's your name?"
> She said, "I go by the name Lois Lane
> And you can be my boyfriend, you surely can
> Just let me quit my boyfriend, he's called Superman."
> I said, "he's a fairy, I do suppose
> Flying through the air in pantyhose ...
> You need a man who's got finesse
> And his whole name across his chest" ...

Like disco music and jumpsuits, the social commentaries of early rappers like Grandmaster Flash and Mellie Mel were for the most part transparent attempts to sell records to whites by any means necessary. Songs like "White Lines" (with its anti-drug theme) and "The Message" (about ghetto life) had the desired effect, drawing fulsome praise from white rock critics, raised on the protest ballads of Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs. The reaction on the street was somewhat less favorable. "The Message" is a case in point. "People hated that record," recalls Russell Simmons, president of Def Jam Records. "I remember the Junebug, a famous DJ of the time, was playing it up at the Fever, and Ronnie DJ put a pistol to his head and said, 'Take that record off and break it or I'll blow your fucking head off.' The whole club stopped until he broke that record and put it in the garbage."

It was not until 1984 that rap broke through to a mass white audience. The first group to do so was Run-DMC, with the release of its debut album, *Run-DMC*, and with *King of Rock* one year later. These albums blazed the trail that rap would travel into the musical mainstream. Bill Adler, a former rock critic and rap's best-

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known publicist, explains: "They were the first group that came on stage as if they had just come off the street corner. But unlike the first generation of rappers, they were solidly middle class. Both of Run's parents were college-educated. DMC was a good Catholic schoolkid, a mama's boy. Neither of them was deprived and neither of them ever ran with a gang, but on stage they became the biggest, baddest, streetest guys in the world." When Run-DMC covered the Aerosmith classic "Walk This Way," the resulting video made it onto MTV, and the record went gold.

Rap's new mass audience was in large part the brainchild of Rick Rubin, a Jewish punk rocker from suburban Long Island who produced the music behind many of rap's biggest acts. Like many New Yorkers his age, Rick grew up listening to Mr. Magic's Rap Attack, a rap radio show on WHBI. In 1983, at the age of 19, Rubin founded Def Jam Records in his NYU dorm room. (Simmons bought part of Def Jam in 1984 and took full control of the company in 1989.) Rubin's next group, the Beastie Boys, was a white punk rock band whose transformation into a rap group pointed rap's way into the future. The Beasties' first album, *Licensed to Ill*, backed by airplay of its anthemic frat-party single "You've Got to Fight for Your Right to Party," became the first rap record to sell a million copies.

The appearance of white groups in a black musical form has historically prefigured the mainstreaming of the form, the growth of the white audience, and the resulting dominance of white performers. With rap, however, this process took an unexpected turn: white demand indeed began to determine the direction of the genre, but what it wanted was music more defiantly black. The result was Public Enemy, produced and marketed by Rubin, the next group significantly to broaden rap's appeal to young whites.

Public Enemy's now familiar mélange of polemic and dance music was formed not on inner-city streets but in the suburban Long Island towns in which the group's members grew up. The children of successful black middle-class professionals, they gave voice to the feeling that, despite progress toward equality, blacks still did not quite belong in white America. They complained of unequal treatment by the police, of never quite overcoming the color of their skin: "We were suburban college kids doing what we were supposed to do, but we were always made to feel like something else," explains Stephney, the group's executive producer.

Public Enemy's abrasive and highly politicized style made it a fast favorite of the white avant-garde, much like the English punk rock band The Clash ten years before. Public Enemy's music, produced by the Shocklee brothers Hank and Keith, was faster, harder, and more abrasive than the rap of the day, music that moved behind the vocals like a full-scale band. But the root of Public Enemy's success was a highly charged theater of race in which white listeners became guilty eavesdroppers on the putative private conversation of the inner city. Chuck D denounced his enemies (the media, some radio stations), proclaimed himself "Public Enemy #1," and praised Louis Farrakhan in stentorian tones, flanked onstage by black-clad security guards from the Nation of Islam, the SIWs, led by Chuck's political mentor, Professor Griff. Flavor Flav, Chuck's homeboy sidekick, parodied street style: oversize sunglasses, baseball cap cocked to one side, a clock the size of a silver plate draped around his neck, going off on wild verbal riffs that often meant nothing at all.

The closer rap moved to the white mainstream, the more it became like rock 'n' roll, a celebration of posturing over rhythm. The back catalogs of artists like James Brown and George Clinton were relentlessly plundered for catchy hooks, then overlaid with dance beats and social commentary. Public Enemy's single "Fight the Power" was the biggest college hit of 1989:

> Elvis was a hero to most
> But he never meant shit to me, you see
> Straight-up racist that sucker was simple and plain
> Motherfuck him and John Wayne
> 'Cause I'm black and I'm proud
> I'm ready and hyped, plus I'm amped
> Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamps
> Sample a look back, you look and find
> Nothing but rednecks for 400 years if you check.

After the release of "Fight the Power," Professor Griff made a series of anti-Semitic remarks in an interview with *The Washington Times*. Griff was subsequently asked to leave the group, for what Chuck D termed errors in judgment. Although these errors were lambasted in editorials across the country, they do not seem to have affected Public Enemy's credibility with its young white fans.

Public Enemy's theatrical black nationalism and sophisticated noise ushered in what is fast coming to be seen as rap's golden age, a heady mix of art, music, and politics. Between 1988 and 1989 a host of innovative acts broke into the mainstream. KRS-One, now a regular on the Ivy League lecture circuit, grew up poor, living on the streets of the South Bronx until he met a New York City social worker, Scott La Rock, later murdered in a drive-by shooting. Together they formed BDP, Boogie Down Productions, recording for the Jive label on RCA. Although songs like "My Philosophy" and "Love's Gonna Get 'Cha (Material Love)" were clever and self-critical, BDP's roots remained firmly planted in the guns-and-posturing of the mainstream rap ghetto.

The ease with which rap can create such aural cartoons, says Hank Shocklee, lies at the very heart of its appeal as entertainment: "Whites have always liked black music," he explains. "That part is hardly new. The difference with rap was that the imagery of black artists, for the first time, reached the level of black music. The sheer number of words in a rap song allows for the creation of full characters impossible in R&B. Rappers become like superheroes. Captain America or the Fantastic Four."

By 1988 the conscious manipulation of racial stereo-

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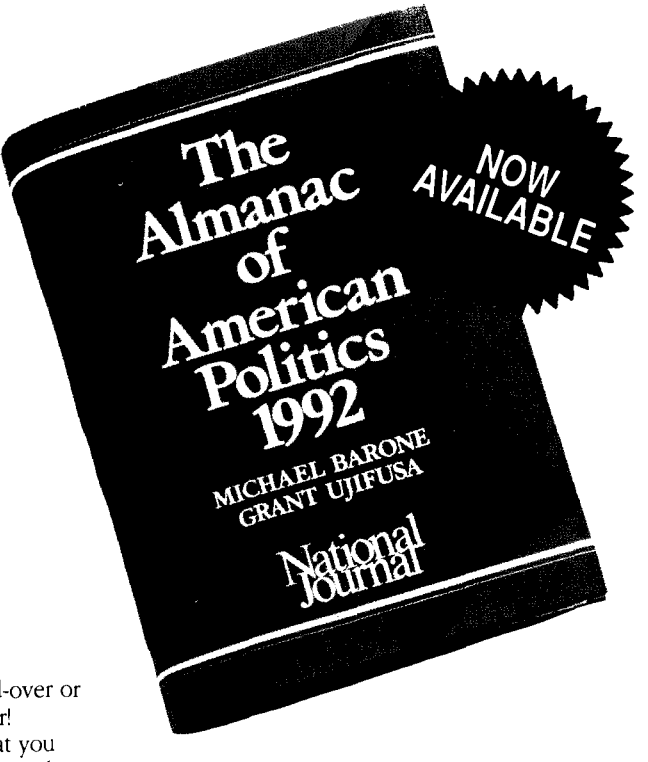

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types had become rap's leading edge, a trend best exemplified by the rise to stardom of Schoolly D, a Philadelphia rapper on the Jive label who sold more than half a million records with little mainstream notice. It was not that the media had never heard of Schoolly D: white critics and fans, for the first time, were simply at a loss for words. His voice, fierce and deeply textured, could alone frighten listeners. He used it as a rhythmic device that made no concessions to pop-song form, talking evenly about smoking crack and using women for sex, proclaiming his blackness, accusing other rappers of not being black enough. What Schoolly D meant by blackness was abundantly clear. Schoolly D was a misogynist and a thug. If listening to Public Enemy was like eavesdropping on a conversation, Schoolly D was like getting mugged. This, aficionados agreed, was what they had been waiting for: a rapper from whom you would flee in abject terror if you saw him walking toward you late at night.

It remained for N.W.A., a more conventional group of rappers from Los Angeles, to adapt Schoolly D's stylistic advance for the mass white market with its first album-length release, *Straight Out of Compton*, in 1989. The much-quoted rap from that album, "Fuck the Police," was the target of an FBI warning to police departments across the country, and a constant presence at certain college parties, white and black:

> "Fuck the Police" coming straight out the underground
> A young nigger got it bad 'cause I'm brown
> And not the other color. Some police think
> They have the authority to kill the minority ...
> A young nigger on the warpath
> And when I'm finished, it's gonna be a bloodbath
> Of cops, dying in L.A.
> Yo, Dre I've got something to say: Fuck the Police.

Other songs spoke of trading oral sex for crack and shooting strangers for fun. After the release of *Straight Out of Compton*, N.W.A.'s lead rapper and chief lyricist, Ice Cube, left the group. Billing himself as "the nigger you love to hate," Ice Cube released a solo album, *Amerikkka's Most Wanted*, which gleefully pushed the limits of rap's ability to give offense. One verse ran:

> I'm thinking to myself, "why did I bang her?"
> Now I'm in the closet, looking for the hanger.

But what made *Amerikkka's Most Wanted* so shocking to so many record buyers was the title track's violation of rap's most iron-clad taboo—black on white violence:

> Word, yo, but who the fuck is heard:
> It's time you take a trip to the suburbs.
> Let 'em see a nigger invasion
> Point blank, on a Caucasian.
> Cock the hammer and crack a smile:
> "Take me to your house, pal ..."

Ice Cube took his act to the big screen this summer in *Boyz N the Hood*, drawing rave reviews for his portrayal of a young black drug dealer whose life of crime leads him to an untimely end. The crime-doesn't-pay message, an inheritance from the grade-B gangster film, is the stock-in-trade of another L.A. rapper-turned-actor, Ice-T of *New Jack City* fame, a favorite of socially conscious rock critics. Tacking unhappy endings onto glorifications of drug dealing and gang warfare, Ice-T offers all the thrills of the form while alleviating any guilt listeners may have felt about consuming drive-by shootings along with their popcorn.

It was in this spirit that "Yo! MTV Raps" debuted in 1989 as the first national broadcast forum for rap music. The videos were often poorly produced, but the music and visual presence of stars like KRS-One, LL Cool J, and Chuck D proved enormously compelling, rocketing "Yo!" to the top of the MTV ratings. On weekends bands were interviewed and videos introduced by Fab Five Freddie; hip young white professionals watched his shows to keep up with urban black slang and fashion. Younger viewers rushed home from school on weekdays to catch ex-Beastie Boys DJ Dr. Dre, a sweatsuit-clad mountain of a man, well over 300 pounds, and Ed Lover, who evolved a unique brand of homeboy Laurel and Hardy mixed with occasional social comment.

With "Yo! MTV Raps," rap became for the first time the music of choice in the white suburbs of middle America. From the beginning, says Doug Herzog, MTV's vice president for programming, the show's audience was primarily white, male, suburban, and between the ages of 16 and 24, a demographic profile that "Yo!"'s success helped set in stone. For its daytime audience, MTV spawned an ethnic rainbow of well-scrubbed pop rappers from MC Hammer to Vanilla Ice to Gerardo, a Hispanic actor turned rap star. For "Yo" itself rap became more overtly politicized as it expanded its audience. Sound bites from the speeches of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King became de rigueur introductions to formulaic assaults on white America mixed with hymns to gang violence and crude sexual caricature.

Holding such polyglot records together is what *Village Voice* critic Nelson George has labeled "ghettocentrism," a style-driven cult of blackness defined by crude stereotypes. P.R. releases, like a recent one for Los Angeles rapper DJ Quik, take special care to mention artists' police records, often enhanced to provide extra street credibility. When Def Jam star Slick Rick was arrested for attempted homicide, Def Jam incorporated the arrest into its publicity campaign for Rick's new album, bartering exclusive rights to the story to *Vanity Fair* in exchange for the promise of a lengthy profile. Muslim groups such as Brand Nubian proclaim their hatred for white devils, especially those who plot to poison black babies. That Brand Nubian believes the things said on its records is unlikely: the group seems to get along quite well with its white Jewish publicist, Beth Jacobson of Electra Records. Anti-white, and, in this case, anti-Semitic, rhymes are a shorthand way of defining one's opposition to the mainstream. Racism is reduced to fashion, by the rappers who use it and by the white

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audiences to whom such images appeal. What's significant here are not so much the intentions of artist and audience as a dynamic in which anti-Semitic slurs and black criminality correspond to "authenticity," and "authenticity" sells records.

The selling of this kind of authenticity to a young white audience is the stock-in-trade of *The Source*, a full-color monthly magazine devoted exclusively to rap music, founded by Jon Shecter while still an undergraduate at Harvard. Shecter is what is known in the rap business as a Young Black Teenager. He wears a Brooklyn Dodgers baseball cap, like Spike Lee, and a Source T-shirt. As editor of *The Source*, Shecter has become a necessary quote for stories about rap in *Time* and other national magazines.

An upper-middle-class white, Shecter has come in for his share of criticism, the most recent of which appeared as a diatribe by the sometime critic and tinpot racist Harry Allen in a black community newspaper, *The City Sun*, which pointed out that Shecter is Jewish. "There's no place for me to say anything," Shecter responds. "Given what I'm doing, my viewpoint has to be that whatever comes of the black community, the hip-hop community which is the black community, is the right thing. I know my place. The only way in which criticism can be raised is on a personal level, because the way that things are set up, with the white-controlled media, prevents sincere back-and-forth discussion from taking place." The latest venture in hip-hop marketing, a magazine planned by Time Warner, will also be edited by a young white, Jonathan van Meter, a former Condé Nast editor.

In part because of young whites like Shecter and van Meter, rap's influence on the street continues to decline. "You put out a record by Big Daddy Kane," Rubin says, "and then put out the same record by a pop performer like Janet Jackson. Not only will the Janet Jackson record sell ten times more copies, it will also be the cool record to play in clubs." Stephney agrees: "Kids in my neighborhood pump dance hall reggae on their systems all night long, because that's where the rhythm is.... People complain about how white kids stole black culture. The truth of the matter is that no one can steal a culture." Whatever its continuing significance in the realm of racial politics, rap's hour as innovative popular music has come and gone. Rap forfeited whatever claim it may have had to particularity by acquiring a mainstream white audience whose tastes increasingly determined the nature of the form. What whites wanted was not music, but black music, which as a result stopped really being either.

White fascination with rap sprang from a particular kind of cultural tourism pioneered by the Jazz Age novelist Carl Van Vechten. Van Vechten's 1926 best seller *Nigger Heaven* imagined a masculine, criminal, yet friendly black ghetto world that functioned, for Van Vechten and for his readers, as a refuge from white middle-class boredom. In *Really the Blues*, the white jazzman Mezz Mezzrow went one step further, claiming that his own life among black people in Harlem had physically transformed him into a member of the Negro race, whose unique sensibility he had now come to share. By inverting the moral values attached to contemporary racial stereotypes, Van Vechten and Mezzrow at once appealed to and sought to undermine the prevailing racial order. Both men, it should be stressed, conducted their tours in person.

The moral inversion of racist stereotypes as entertainment has lost whatever transformative power it may arguably have had fifty years ago. MC Serch of 3rd Bass, a white rap traditionalist, with short-cropped hair and thick-rimmed Buddy Holly glasses, formed his style in the uptown hip-hop clubs like the L.Q. in the early 1980s. "Ten or eleven years ago," he remarks, "when I was wearing my permanent-press Lee's with a beige campus shirt and matching Adidas sneakers, kids I went to school with were calling me a 'wigger,' 'black wanna-be,' all kinds of racist names. Now those same kids are driving Jeeps with MCM leather interiors and pumping Public Enemy."

The ways in which rap has been consumed and popularized speak not of cross-cultural understanding, musical or otherwise, but of a voyeurism and tolerance of racism in which black and white are both complicit. "Both the rappers and their white fans affect and commodify their own visions of street culture," argues Henry Louis Gates Jr. of Harvard University, "like buying Navajo blankets at a reservation road-stop. A lot of what you see in rap is the guilt of the black middle class about its economic success, its inability to put forth a culture of its own. Instead they do the worst possible thing, falling back on fantasies of street life. In turn, white college students with impeccable gender credentials buy nasty sex lyrics under the cover of getting at some kind of authentic black experience."

Gates goes on to make the more worrying point: "What is potentially very dangerous about this is the feeling that by buying records they have made some kind of valid social commitment." Where the assimilation of black street culture by whites once required a degree of human contact between the races, the street is now available at the flick of a cable channel—to black and white middle class alike. "People want to consume and they want to consume easy," Hank Shocklee says. "If you're a suburban white kid and you want to find out what life is like for a black city teenager, you buy a record by N.W.A. It's like going to an amusement park and getting on a roller coaster ride—records are safe, they're controlled fear, and you always have the choice of turning it off. That's why nobody ever takes a train up to 125th Street and gets out and starts walking around. Because then you're not in control anymore: it's a whole other ball game." This kind of consumption—of racist stereotypes, of brutality toward women, or even of uplifting tributes to Dr. Martin Luther King—is of a particularly corrupting kind. The values it instills find their ultimate expression in the ease with which we watch young black men killing each other: in movies, on records, and on the streets of cities and towns across the country. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Finding Themselves

Very often an opening shot tells us a lot about a director. The first thing we see in **The Cry of the Owl** (R5/S8) is a darkened room. Then a young woman switches on the lights. That's all; yet by its crisp simplicity, we know that the director wanted to avoid a cliché opening or a pretentious one. He wanted to use the ordinary in a way that evoked both our interest and our confidence in him.

That director was Claude Chabrol, who knows everything there is to know about filmmaking. He has made more than forty films since 1957, when in a sense he spawned the French New Wave. I haven't seen them all—not all have been released here—but among the ones I know are such gems as *Landru* and *This Man Must Die*. *The Cry of the Owl* was made in 1987 (he has made four films since then), was released spottily in the United States, and is now launched again by the Film Forum in New York. A good thing, too.

The screenplay, adapted by Chabrol and Odile Barski from a Patricia Highsmith novel, tells the story of an unlucky man. Robert is a draftsman, whose hobby is drawing predatory birds. (Among them is an owl.) A Parisian, he has moved to Vichy while getting a divorce and is trying to put himself in order. He is subject to depressions, but he has humor and warmth. He is haunted by the feeling that death accompanies him without touching him; and he has some reason to think so.

Gently, unmalevolently, he likes to spy through the windows of the house of Juliette, the woman we saw in the first shot. He doesn't know her and means no ill: he simply enjoys vicariously, from behind the trees, the life she lives with her boyfriend. She senses that someone is watching, and after some days, one afternoon when she is burning trash in the garden, Robert appears and explains himself.

Out of this odd encounter eventually come several murders and a suicide. Robert is completely innocent yet is more and more entangled. At the last, when still another killing occurs of which he is innocent, he reaches to involve himself. There's a final freeze frame (as we hear the owl's cry). Possibly he is about to put his fingerprints where they will incriminate him; this would keep him from causing more deaths, however innocently.

What is most intriguing about the story is that it seems not to have been plotted: we don't hear scriptwriters hammering and sawing. Certain characters are assembled, and from an initial premise, they simply follow their natures. Thus the story unwinds its skeins and knits various fates.

Critics often compare Chabrol to Hitchcock (about whom he co-wrote a book with Eric Rohmer). At his best Chabrol seems to me to function as well as Hitchcock and with less hand-rubbing self-display. Except for an occasional Hitchcockian touch in *The Cry of the Owl*, like the trash fire leaping between Robert and Juliette when they first meet, Chabrol's directing mirrors the script's style: neat, shrewdly selective, limpid rather than patently scintillating. And yet before long we see that, tacitly, it does scintillate.

As Robert, Christophe Malavoy is completely engaging. His reserve, his empathy make his increasing entanglements much more moving than the conventional "wrong man" theme of Hitchcock because the story is less plotty, more humane. The woman who plays Juliette, Mathilda May, is one of the latest sensations of French films. This is easy to understand. She is quite competent and is strikingly attractive. The cinematographer—I could almost say "as usual" because he has done so many Chabrol films—was Jean Rabier. Excellent, as usual.

On the other hand, the opening shot of **Frankie and Johnny** (Paramount) is from a helicopter looking down on highway traffic. The heart sinks. After this banality, the picture has nowhere to go but up. It doesn't get there, but at least it spends most of its time recognizing further banalities—in the script—and trying to circumvent them.

The screenplay is by Terrence McNally from a two-character play of his that I didn't see. In that form it may have had some adroitness. Opened up—very wide—for the screen with many more characters and settings, the two-handed game of sex and love between a waitress and a short-order cook who find each other in a Ninth Avenue diner in New York becomes a lot of padding

FILMS WORTH SEEING

La Belle Noiseuse. *Jacques Rivette's adaptation of Balzac's "Unknown Masterpiece" runs four hours and needs it. Michel Piccoli as a famous but wearied painter, Emanuelle Béart as his nude model cautiously inspiring him, are fine. (Reviewed 11/4/91)* **City of Hope.** *John Sayles's anatomy of urban corruption, written somewhat facilely, directed and acted to the hilt. (10/14/91)* **The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe.** *Lily Tomlin performs Jane Wagner's script taken from their one-woman stage show. Though character definitions eventually blur, there's lots of sharp comedy. (10/7/91)* **Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll.** *Eric Bogosian's one-man stage show, written by himself, transferred to film. Not so funny as Tomlin's but with much angrier bite, even though here, too, characters eventually blur a bit. (10/7/91)* **—SK**

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around a thin, predictable story.

However, no padding hides the fact that we're dealing here with an updated version of Paddy Chayefsky—two Little People who are Lonely. Chayefsky at least could be true to his territory. McNally's handicap in writing about this world—he often writes about other sorts of people—is that he can't be true to it. He keeps intruding McNally smarts into a hash-house milieu. Frankie and Johnny exchange high-gloss repartee. And how many waitresses in diners refer to Marcel Marceau and Captain Ahab?

We know from the start that the story will end in the union of the title pair, not with a 1920s clinch but with a wry willingness to "commit." The director, Garry Marshall, who did *Pretty Woman* and thus has experience in freshening up the trite, does fairly well. His best work is not with the camera but with Michelle Pfeiffer as Frankie. Pfeiffer's part has a small range, full of vernacular emotion, and Marshall, as he did with Julia Roberts in the earlier film, helps Pfeiffer to inflect it in everyday terms.

But the film is doomed because of the casting of Johnny. A story like this depends utterly on the feelings generated between the lovers, our pleasure in being around them as they court and fight and don't fight. Johnny is an ex-con, Frankie a battered woman, and we want to enjoy his restitution of her confidence in love. What a part it would have been for Burt Reynolds, who is only four years older than the man they gave it to. Al Pacino. Pacino as a love-smitten, witty, breezy, finagling lover is a sight not to behold. Comedy is not comfortable with him, and as for his bursts of Truffaut-like lyricism, let's just say that one of the most off-putting images in modern film is Pacino's smile.

Kate Nelligan plays Frankie's waitress friend, the wise-cracking, tough, heart-of-gold, easy-lay woman who apparently works in every American diner and who was last played memorably by Diane Ladd in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore.* To most viewers Nelligan will seem merely to give a pleasant performance of a familiar role. Those who saw her in such plays as *A Moon for the Misbegotten* and *Plenty*—or *Virginia*, in which she played Virginia Woolf!—will get more fun out of her versatility.

Question: Will the televising of the Clarence Thomas hearings, available to all of all ages, force the Motion Picture Association of America to revise its rating code? •

Why American poetry belongs in the supermarket.

An Immodest Proposal

By Joseph Brodsky

About an hour ago, the stage where I stand now, as well as your seats, were quite empty. An hour hence, they will be empty again. For most of the day, I imagine, this place stays empty; emptiness is its natural state. Had it been endowed with consciousness, it would regard our presence as a nuisance. This is as good an illustration as any of one's insignificance in any case; certainly of the significance of our gathering. No matter what brings us here, the ratios are not in our favor. Pleased as we may be with our number, in spatial terms it is of infinitesimal consequence.

This is true, I think, of any human assembly; but when it comes to poetry, it rings a special bell. For one thing, poetry, the writing or the reading of it, is an atomizing art; it is far less social than music or painting. Also, poetry has a certain appetite for emptiness, starting, say, with that of infinity. Mainly, though, because historically speaking the ratio of poetry's audience to the rest of society is not in the former's favor. So we should be pleased with one another, if only because our being here, for all its seeming insignificance, is a continuation of that history which, by some accounts floating around this town, has ended.

Throughout what we call recorded history, the audience for poetry does not appear to have exceeded 1 percent of the entire population. The basis for this

Joseph Brodsky is the Poet Laureate/Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., where a slightly different version of this essay was delivered as a lecture in October. His new book, *Watermark*, will be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux this spring.

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estimate is not any particular research, but the mental climate of the world that we live in. In fact, the weather has been such that, at times, the quoted figure seems a bit generous. Neither Greek nor Roman antiquity, nor the glorious Renaissance, nor the Enlightenment provides us with an impression of poetry commanding huge audiences, let alone legions or battalions, or of its readership being vast.

It never was. Those whom we call the classics owe their reputations not to their contemporaries, but to their posterity. This is not to say that posterity is the quantitative expression of their worth. It just supplies them, albeit retroactively and with some effort, with the size of readership to which they were entitled from the beginning. As it was, their actual circumstances were by and large fairly narrow; they courted patrons or flocked to the courts pretty much in the same way poets today go to the universities. Obviously that had to do with the hope of largess; but it was also the quest for an audience. Literacy being the privilege of the few, where else could a poet find a sympathetic ear or an attentive eye for his lines? The seat of power was often the seat of culture; and its diet was better, the company was less monochrome and more tender than elsewhere, including the monastery.

Centuries passed. Seats of power and seats of culture parted ways, it seems for good. That, of course, is the price you pay for democracy, for the rule of the people, by the people, and for the people, of whom still only 1 percent reads poetry. If a modern poet has anything in common with his Renaissance colleague, it is in the first place the paltry distribution of his work. Depending on one's temperament, one may relish the archetypal aspects of this predicament—pride oneself in being the means of carrying on the hallowed tradition, or derive a similar degree of comfort from one's so well-precedented resignation. There is nothing more psychologically rewarding than linking oneself to the glories of the past, if only because the past is more articulate than the present, not to mention the future.

A poet can always talk himself out of a jam; after all, that's his métier. But I am here to speak not about the predicament of the poet, who is never, in the final analysis, a victim. I am here to speak about the plight of his audience: about your plight, as it were. Since I am paid this year by the Library of Congress, I take this job in the spirit of a public servant, not in any other. So it is the audience for poetry in this country that is my concern; and it is the public servant in me who finds the existing ratio of 1 percent appalling and scandalous, not to say tragic. Neither my temperament, nor the chagrin of an author over his own dismal sales, has anything to do with this appraisal.

The standard number of copies of a first or second collection by any poet in this country is something between 2,000 and 10,000 (and I speak of the commercial houses only). The latest census that I've seen gives the population of the United States as approximately 250 million. This means that a standard commercial publishing house, printing this or that author's first or second volume, aims at only 0.001 percent of the entire population. To me, this is absurd.

What stood for centuries in the way of the public's access to poetry was the absence of press and the limitation of literacy. Now both are practically universal, and the aforementioned ratio is no longer justifiable. Actually, even if we are to go by that 1 percent, it should result in publishers printing not 2,000 to 10,000 copies of a poet's collection, but 2.5 million. Do we have that many readers of poetry in this country? I believe that we do; in fact, I believe that we have a lot more than that. Just how many could be determined, of course, through market research, but that is precisely what should be avoided.

For market research is restrictive by definition. So is any sociological breakdown of census figures into groups, classes, and categories. They presuppose certain binding characteristics pertaining to each social group, ushering in their prescribed treatment. This leads, plain and simple, to a reduction of people's mental diet, to their intellectual segregation. The market for poetry is believed to be those with a college education, and that's whom a publisher targets. The blue-collar crowd is not supposed to read Horace, nor the farmer in his overalls Montale or Marvell. Nor, for that matter, is the politician expected to know by heart Gerard Manley Hopkins or Elizabeth Bishop.

This is dumb as well as dangerous. More about that later. For the moment I'd like to assert only that the distribution of poetry should not be based on market criteria, since any such estimate, by definition, shortchanges the existing potential. When it comes to poetry, the net result of market research, for all its computers, is distinctly medieval. We are all literate, therefore everybody is a potential reader of poetry: it is on this assumption that the distribution of books should be based, not on some claustrophobic notion of demand. For in cultural matters, it is not demand that creates supply, it is the other way around. You read Dante because he wrote the *Divine Comedy*, not because you felt the need for him: you would not have been able to conjure either the man or the poem.

Poetry must be available to the public in far greater volume than it is. It should be as ubiquitous as the nature that surrounds us, and from which poetry derives many of its similes; or as ubiquitous as gas stations, if not as cars themselves. Bookstores should be located not only on campuses or main drags, but at the assembly plant's gates also. Paperbacks of those we deem classics should be cheap and sold at supermarkets. This is, after all, a country of mass production, and I don't see why what's done for cars can't be done for books of poetry, which take you quite a bit further. Because you don't want to go a bit further? Perhaps; but if this is so, it's because you are deprived of the means of transportation, not because the distances and the destinations that I have in mind don't exist.

Even to sympathetic ears, I suppose, all this may sound a bit loony. Well, it isn't; it also makes perfect economic sense. A book of poetry printed in 2.5 million copies and priced at, say, $2, will in the end bring in more than 10,000 copies of the same edition priced at $20. You may encounter, of course, a problem of storage, but then you'll be compelled to distribute as far and wide as the country. Moreover, if the government would recognize that the construction of your library is as essential to your inner vocation as business lunches are to your outer vocation, tax breaks could be made available to those who read, write, or publish poetry. The main loser, of course, would be the Brazilian rain forest. But I believe that a tree facing the choice between becoming a book of poems or a bunch of memos may well opt for the former.

A book goes a long way. Overkill in cultural matters is not an optional strategy, it is a necessity, since selective cultural targeting spells defeat no matter how well one's aim is taken. Fittingly, then, without having any idea what it is in particular that I am addressing at this moment, I would like to suggest that with the low-cost technology currently available, there is now a discernible opportunity to turn this nation into an enlightened democracy. And I think this opportunity should be risen to before literacy is replaced with videocy.

I recommend that we begin with poetry not only because this way we would echo the development of our civilization—the song was there before the

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story—but also because it is cheaper to produce. A dozen titles would be a decent beginning. The average poetry reader's bookshelf contains, I believe, somewhere between thirty and fifty collections by various authors. It's possible to put half of it on a single shelf, or a mantelpiece—or if worse comes to worst, on the windowsill—of every American household. The cost of a dozen poetry paperbacks, even at their current price, would amount at most to one-fourth the price of a television set. That this is not done has to do not with the absence of a popular appetite for poetry, but with the near impossibility of whetting this appetite: with the unavailability of books. In my view, books should be brought to the doorstep like electricity, or like milk in England: they should be considered utilities, and their cost should be appropriately minimal. Barring that, poetry could be sold in drugstores (not least because it might reduce the bill from your shrink). At the very least, an anthology of American poetry should be found in the drawer in every room in every motel in the land, next to the Bible, which will surely not object to this proximity, since it does not object to the proximity of the phone book.

All this is doable, in this country especially. For, apart from anything else, American poetry is this country's greatest patrimony. It takes a stranger to see some things clearly. This is one of them, and I am that stranger. The quantity of verse that has been penned on these shores in the last century and a half dwarfs the similar enterprise of any literature, and for that matter, both our jazz and our cinema, rightly adored throughout the world. The same goes, I dare say, for its quality, for this is a poetry informed by the spirit of personal responsibility. There is nothing more alien to American poetry than those great continental specialities: the sensibility of the victim with its wildly oscillating, blamethirsty finger; the incoherence of elevation; the Promethean affectations and special pleading. To be sure, American verse has its vices—too many parochial visionary, a verbose neurotic. But it is extremely tempering stuff, and sticking with the 1 percent distribution method robs this nation of a natural resource of endurance, not to mention a source of pride.

It is a truly remarkable phenomenon, American poetry. Many years ago I showed Anna Akhmatova, a great Russian poet, several poems by Robert Frost, from his *North of Boston*. A few days later I returned and asked her what she thought. "What kind of poet is this?" she asked, in mock indignation. "He talks all the time about what people sell and buy! About getting insurance and all that!" (I suppose she was referring to his "Star Splitter.") And after a pause she added, "What a terrifying poet." The epithet was well chosen. It bespoke the distinction of Frost's posture vis-à-vis the traditional "tragic" posture of the poet in European and Russian literature. For tragedy, even self-inflicted tragedy, is always a fait accompli, a backward look; whereas terror is future-bound, and has to do with apprehension or, more accurately, with the recognition of one's own negative potential.

I am sorely tempted to suggest that this terrifying aspect is indeed Frost's—and with him, all American poetry's—forte. Poetry, by definition, is a highly individualistic art; in a sense, this country is its logical abode. At any rate, it is only logical that in this country this individualistic tendency has gone to its idiosyncratic extreme, in modernists and traditionalists alike. (In fact, this is what gave birth to modernists.) To my eye as well as my ear, American poetry is a relentless non-stop sermon on human autonomy; the song of the atom, if you will, defying the chain reaction. Its general tone is that of resilience and fortitude, of exacting the full look at the worst and not blinking. It certainly keeps

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its eyes wide open, not so much in wonderment, or poised for a revelation, as on the lookout for danger. It is short on consolation (the diversion of so much European poetry, especially Russian); rich and extremely lucid in detail; free of nostalgia for some Golden Age; big on hardihood and escape. If one looked for its motto, I would suggest Frost's line from "A Servant to Servants": "The best way out is always through."

If I permit myself to speak about American poetry in such a wholesale manner, it is not because of its body's strength and vastness, but because my subject is the public's access to it. And in this context it must be pointed out that the old adage about a poet's role in, or his duty to, his society puts the entire issue upside-down. If one can speak of the social function of somebody who is essentially self-employed, then the social function of a poet is writing, which he does not by society's appointment but by his own volition. His only duty is to his language, that is, to write well. By writing, especially by writing well, in the language of his society, a poet takes a large step toward it. It is society's job to meet him half way, that is, to open his book and to read it.

If one can speak of any dereliction of duty here, it's not on the part of the poet, for he keeps writing. Now, poetry is the supreme form of human locution in any culture. By failing to read or listen to poets, a society dooms itself to inferior modes of articulation—of the politician, or the salesman, or the charlatan—in short, to its own. It forfeits, in other words, its own evolutionary potential, for what distinguishes us from the rest of the animal kingdom is precisely the gift of speech. The charge frequently leveled against poetry—that it is difficult, obscure, hermetic, and whatnot—indicates not the state of poetry, but, frankly, the rung of the evolutionary ladder on which society is stuck.

For poetic discourse is continuous; it also avoids cliché and repetition. The absence of those things is what distinguishes art from life, whose chief stylistic device, if one may say so, is precisely cliché and repetition, since it always starts from scratch. It is no wonder that society today, chancing on this continuing poetic discourse, finds itself at a loss, as if opening a book in the middle. I have remarked elsewhere that poetry is not a form of entertainment, and in a certain sense not even a form of art, but our anthropological, genetic goal, our linguistic, evolutionary beacon. We seem to sense this as children, when we absorb and remember verses in order to master language. As adults, however, we abandon this pursuit, convinced that we have mastered it. Yet what we've mastered is but an idiom, good enough perhaps to outfox an enemy, to sell a product, to get laid, to earn a promotion, but certainly not good enough to cure anguish or cause joy. Until one learns to pack one's sentences with meanings like a van or to discern and love in the beloved's features a "pilgrim soul," until one becomes aware that "no memory of having starred / atones for later disregard / or keeps the end from being hard"—until things like that are in one's bloodstream, one still belongs among the sublinguals. Who are the majority, if that's a comfort.

If nothing else, reading poetry is a process of terrific linguistic osmosis. It is also a highly economical form of mental acceleration. Within a very short space a good poem covers enormous mental ground, and often, toward its finale, provides one with an epiphany or a revelation. As a tool of cognition, poetry beats any existing form of analysis (*a*) because it pares down our reality to its linguistic essentials, whose interplay, be it clash or fusion, yields that epiphany or that revelation, and (*b*) because it exploits the rhythmic and euphonic properties of the language that in themselves are revelatory. In other words, what a poem, or more accurately the language itself, tells you is "be like me." It tells you that your soul has got a long way to go. For at the moment of reading you become what you read, you become the state of the language which is a poem, and its epiphany or its revelation is yours. They are still yours once you shut the book, since you can't revert to not having had them. That's what evolution is all about.

Now the purpose of evolution is the survival neither of the fittest nor of the defeatist. Were it the former, we would have to settle for Arnold Schwarzenegger; were it the latter, which ethically is a more sound proposition, we'd have to make do with Woody Allen. The purpose of evolution, believe it or not, is beauty, which survives it all and generates truth simply by being a fusion of the mental and the sensual. As it is always in the eye of the beholder, it can't be wholly embodied save in words: that's what ushers in a poem, which is as incurably semantic as it is incurably euphonic.

No other language accumulates so much of this as does English. To be born into it or to arrive in it is the best boon that can befall a man. To prevent its keepers from full access to it is an anthropological crime, and that's what the present system of the distribution of poetry boils down to. I don't rightly know what's worse, burning books or not reading them. I think, though, that token publishing falls somewhere in between. I am sorry to put this so drastically, but when I think of the great works by the poets of this language bulldozed into neglect on the one hand, and then consider the mind-boggling demographic vista on the other, I feel that we are on the verge of a tremendous cultural backslide. And it is not the culture I am worried about, nor the fate of the great or not-so-great poets' works. What concerns me is that man, unable to articulate, to express himself adequately, reverts to action. Since the vocabulary of action is limited, as it were, to his body, he is bound to act violently, extending his vocabulary with a weapon where there should have been an adjective.

In short, the good old quaint ways should be abandoned. There should be a nationwide distribution of poetry, classic and contemporary. It should be handled privately, I suppose, but supported by the state. The age group it should be aiming at is 15 and up. The emphasis should be on the American classics; and as to who or what should be printed, that should be decided by a body of two or three people in the know, that is, by the poets. The academics, with their ideological bickering, should be kept out of it, for nobody has the authority to prescribe in this field on any grounds other than taste. Beauty and its attendant truth are not to be subordinated to any philosophical, political, or even ethical doctrine, since aesthetics is the

A Simple Criminal

Not a man but an obsolete child.
Here is the night come to fetch me home.
Here is a wife come to punish me.
Here is a mother come to send me away.

Not a bird but a cage. Here
is the sun come to shine through bars
as if ribs could bend this Gothic
arch and contain the wind, organ

in church bellowing. Not a cage
like a burnt offering old fashioned
a town the Romans left burning burning
and the morning hides its eyes.

The world is a violent world
and I am at home like you.

Bin Ramke

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mother of ethics and not the other way around. If you think otherwise, try to recall the circumstances in which you fall in love.

What should be kept in mind, however, is that there is a tendency in society to appoint one great poet per period, often per century. This is done in order to avoid the responsibility of reading others, or for that matter the chosen one, should you find his or her temperament uncongenial. The fact is that at any given moment in any literature there are several poets of equal gravity and significance by whose lights you can go. In any case, whatever their number, in the end it corresponds to the known temperaments, for it can't be otherwise: hence their differences. By grace of language, they are there to provide society with a hierarchy or a spectrum of aesthetic standards to emulate, to ignore, to acknowledge. They are not so much role models as mental shepherds, whether they are cognizant of it or not—and it's better if they are not. Society needs all of them; and should the project I am speaking of ever be embarked upon, no preferences should be shown to any one of them. Since on these heights there is no hierarchy, the fanfare should be equal.

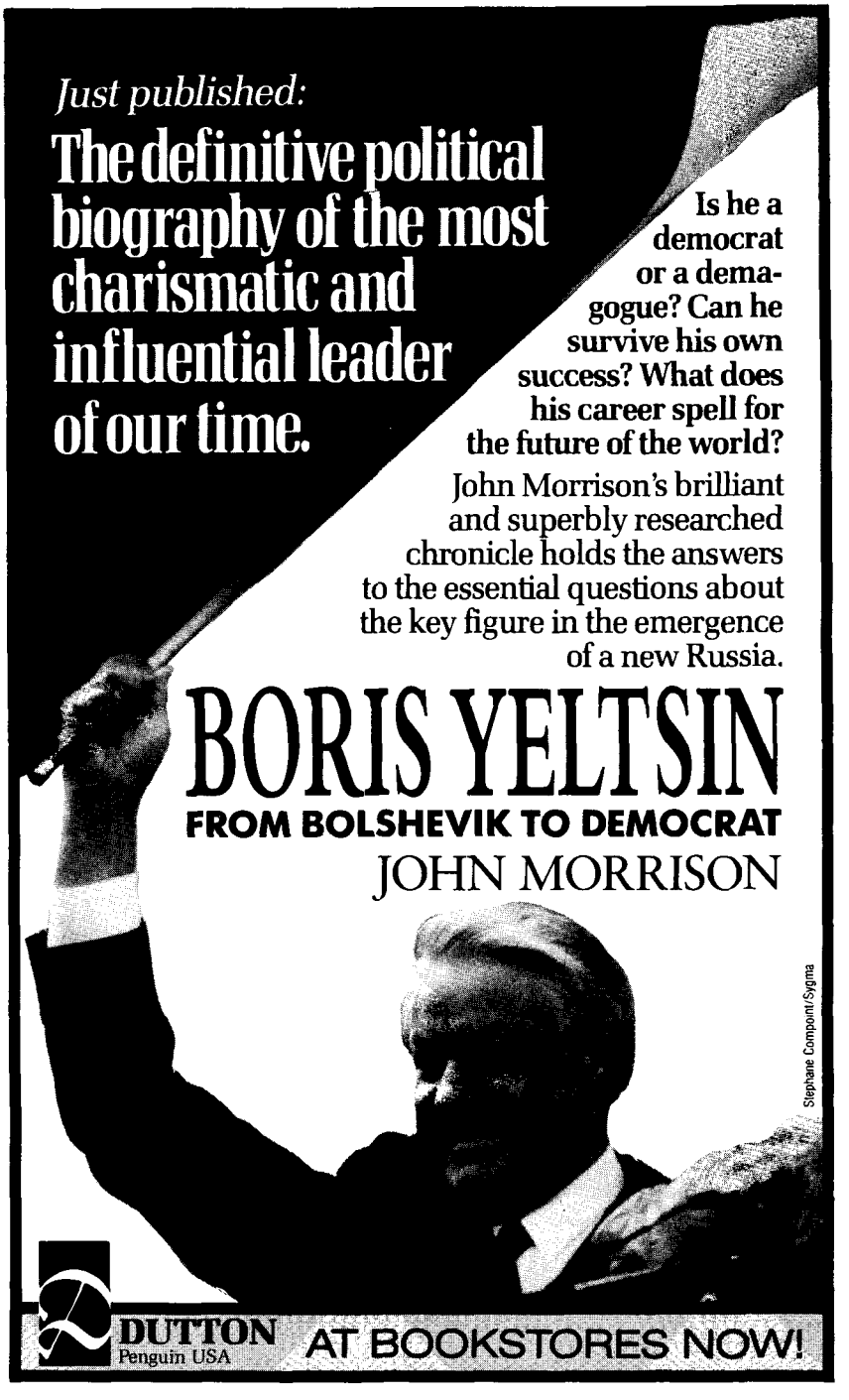
For a poet to sink into oblivion is not such an extraordinary drama; it comes with the territory, he can afford it. As I said, he is never a loser; he knows that others will come in his stead and pick up the trail where he left it. (In fact, it's the swelling number of others, energetic and vocal, clamoring for attention, that drive him into oblivion.) He can take this, as well as being regarded as a sissy. It is society that cannot afford to be oblivious, and it is society that—compared with the mental toughness of practically any poet—comes out a sissy and a loser. For society, whose main strength is that of reproducing itself, to lose a poet is like having a brain cell busted. This impairs one's speech, makes one draw a blank where an ethical choice is to be made; or it barnacles speech with qualifiers, turns one into an eager receptacle for demagogues or just pure noise. The organs of reproduction, however, are not affected.

There are few cures for hereditary disorders (undetectable, perhaps, in an individual, but striking in a crowd), and what I'm suggesting here is not one of them. I just hope that this idea, if it catches on, may slow down somewhat the spread of our cultural malaise to the next generation. As I said, I took this job in the spirit of public service, and maybe being paid by the Library of Congress in Washington has gone to my head. Perhaps I fancy myself as a sort of surgeon general slapping a label onto the current packaging of poetry. Something like "This Way of Doing Business is Dangerous to the National Health." The fact that we are alive does not mean that we are not sick.

It's often been said—first, I think, by Santayana—that those who don't remember history are bound to repeat it. Poetry doesn't make such claims. Still, it has some things in common with history: it employs memory, and it is of use for the future, not to mention the present. It certainly cannot reduce poverty, but it can do something for ignorance. Also, it is the only insurance available against the vulgarity of the human heart. Therefore it should be available to everyone in this country and at a low cost.

Fifty million copies of an anthology of American poetry for $2 a copy can be sold in a country of 250 million. Perhaps not at once, but gradually, over a decade or so, they will sell. Books find their readers. And if they will not sell, well, let them lie around, absorb dust, rot, and disintegrate. There is always going to be a child who will fish a book out of the garbage heap. I was such a child, for what it's worth; so, perhaps, were some of you.

A quarter of a century ago, in a previ-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ous incarnation in Russia, I knew a man who was translating Robert Frost into Russian. I got to know him because I saw his translations: they were stunning poems in Russian, and I wanted to become acquainted with the man as much as I wanted to see the originals. He showed me a hardcover edition (I think it was by Holt and Rinehart), which fell open onto the page with "Happiness Makes Up in Height for What It Lacks in Length." Across the page went a huge, size twelve imprint of a soldier's boot. The front page of the book bore the stamp "STALAG #3B," which was a World War II concentration camp for Allied POWs somewhere in France.

Now there is a case of a book of poems finding its reader. All it had to do was be around. Otherwise it couldn't be stepped on, let alone picked up. •

Harlem Comes to Cotton

BY JOE KLEIN

Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.: The Political Biography of an American Dilemma by Charles V. Hamilton

(Atheneum, 545 pp., $24.95)

In the evening of August 1, 1943, a white police officer tried to arrest a black woman for disorderly conduct in the lobby of a Harlem hotel. A black soldier intervened; there was a scuffle; the soldier was shot in the shoulder by the policeman and taken to a local hospital. Rumors spread: the soldier was dead, the cop was drunk, the cop had assaulted the soldier's mother. A crowd of 3,000 gathered outside the hospital. Bottles flew; the crowd scattered and started looting. When it was over, five people (all black) were dead, 565 were hospitalized, 500 arrested, 1,234 storefronts were smashed (most of them looted).

In New York all race riots are the same; the aftermath of each race riot is disingenuous in its own way. The riot of 1943 was an echo of a similar event in 1935, when a Puerto Rican youth had been caught shoplifting. (The rumor then was that he'd been beaten to death. The truth was that he hadn't even been arrested.) It was, obviously, a preview of riots to come in 1964, in 1977, and, in Crown Heights, in 1991.

The 1943 aftermath is instructive, though. The black middle-class establishment—still living in Harlem, not yet permitted to integrate the suburbs—deplored the violence. There was no attempt to justify it. The black media agreed that the riot had been the work of "hooligans." The *Pittsburgh Courier*, then the largest national black newspaper, said: "As mayor LaGuardia commented, this was no race riot. It was a boiling over of bad blood among an increasingly dangerous segment of our own group." (Indeed, it was left to Harold Orlansky's team of Columbia University sociologists to point out months later the racial fury behind the explosion.)

But then, the Rev. Adam Clayton Powell was out of town that week. Had he been around, Harlem's most charismatic preacher and political leader almost certainly would have sounded a different trumpet, one more familiar to post-'60s riot scholars. A year earlier, when a black man had been shot dead by a white officer, Powell had sent a leaflet through the streets: "ONE MORE NEGRO BRUTALLY BEATEN AND KILLED! SHOT DOWN LIKE A DOG BY POLICE ... ALL OUT HARLEM." This was followed by an editorial by Powell in the *People's Voice*, protesting LaGuardia's refusal to act in the case:

> The Mayor of the City of New York is one of the most pathetic figures on the current American scene.... When every elected political leader of all parties desired an appointment concerning the brutal slaying of Wallace Armstrong, he not only refused to see them, but did not have the decency to acknowledge the telegram.... If the mayor ran against Mickey Mouse tomorrow ... he would be defeated.

Al Sharpton couldn't have done it better. Indeed, New York legend has it that when Sharpton was a boy preacher a quarter of a century ago, he received instruction in his trade at the knee of Adam Clayton Powell. Charles V. Hamilton doesn't mention this mentoring, but it fits: Powell was a seminal figure, the first modern rogue civil rights leader, a maddening amalgam of morality and amorality, brilliance and corruption.

It is Hamilton's contention that Powell is a perfect lens through which to view the gap between America's human rights canon and its racial reality. In one sense, he's right. Before most other black leaders were willing to be so brazen, Powell delighted in exposing white America's racial hypocrisy. He fought the good fight against die-hard racists such as Mississippi's John Rankin on the floor of Congress (to Rankin's shock and dismay: he expected more respectful behavior from "niggers," a term that faded from congressional discourse after Powell was elected to the House in 1944). But Powell didn't shy away from the tougher battles either. He wasn't afraid to call Franklin Roosevelt or Harry Truman on their hypocrisies, a boldness that cost Powell dearly in influence during the Truman presidency. He even was willing to take on liberals such as LaGuardia and Eleanor Roosevelt when he caught them acting expediently. Anything less than a total commitment to immediate integration was unacceptable. He refused to give an inch.

But Powell epitomizes a more subtle dilemma as well, one that Hamilton (who co-authored *Black Power* with Stokely Carmichael in 1967) is ill-equipped, perhaps unwilling, to confront. Powell was the progenitor of the badass school of black leadership. He was the spiritual father of Sharpton, of Gus Savage (though Powell was no anti-Semite), of Marion Barry, and, to a lesser extent, of Jesse Jackson. He was a con man and a demagogue who was stripped of his committee chair in Congress after years of flagrant corruption. He was forced to spend a decade of his life—except on Sundays—outside New York, for fear of being subpoenaed in a slander suit. (He didn't seem to mind the exile, repairing to Bimini almost always in the company of a woman other than his wife.)

In 1966 Edward Costikyan neatly summarized the phenomenon in *Behind Closed Doors*, his book about New York City politics:

> Powell has been enormously successful in annoying the white power structure by his anarchistic refusal to abide by any of its standards of acceptable behavior. Every time he does this, however, he expresses the secret and not-so-secret desire of his constituents.... It is perhaps this capacity to rub the white man's nose in the black man's ugly situation that endears Powell most to those Negro New Yorkers who follow him.

Hence, the second dilemma: the understandable but usually disastrous temptation of black Americans to raise up (and then to protect) leaders who express their anger more eloquently than their hopes, leaders whose ultimate impact is to increase alienation rather than to win justice, whose interest is to

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perpetuate divisions rather than to heal them, whose victories are almost always symbolic—and always Pyrrhic.

It is notable that Hamilton, in writing an otherwise fair-minded biography, does not address this signal American tragedy, so manifestly apparent in the life of his subject. Certainly he makes no attempt to hide Powell's warts. He reports NAACP President Arthur Springarn's assessment that if Powell "had character, he'd be a great man." But character, for Hamilton, seems merely a diversion. Powell's "flaws" were an excuse, he asserts, that white America used to avoid The Issue: "How one responded to Adam Powell reflected how one responded to the American Dilemma. His personal eccentricities made the response more difficult, but in a sense this made it more meaningful."

This is nonsense. It was possible to dismiss Powell and still remain devoted to the cause of racial equity. Indeed, equal justice *demanded* a condemnation of Powell: of the sort, say, that Murray Kempton lavished on him, calling Powell "a lazy, careless, and selfish man." The trouble is, most white liberals, to say nothing of most rational blacks, were (and still are) reluctant to be so blunt. Whites were afraid of being called racists, and blacks didn't want to seem traitorous. In that sense, Hamilton has a point (though perhaps not the one he intended): the badass style of leadership represents a direct challenge to American hypocrisy. The reluctance to condemn black demagogues, the willingness to accept any and all rationales for criminality and personal irresponsibility, is nothing but another form of racism, subtler but no less insidious than the bilious stuff peddled by the Rankins and the Bilbos and the Thurmonds through much of this century.

Adam Clayton Powell Jr. was a compelling figure, but a biographer's nightmare. He seems not to have been at all introspective. Hamilton has combed the congressman's papers and interviewed just about everyone still alive who was close to him, but he hasn't had much luck getting beyond the public mask. Powell seems all surface, all flash, all performance. He is relentlessly opaque. His motives remain a mystery.

He was born on November 29, 1908, in New Haven, but the family soon moved to New York, where his father assumed the pulpit of the famed Abyssinian Baptist Church. It wasn't a difficult childhood; young Powell was coddled by his mother and aunts and maids (throughout his life women found him irresistible, and vice versa). He grew up tall, light (light enough to "pass," as he sometimes did), and handsome. His academic career was less distinguished than his social life, but it was respectable—and, unusual for the time, it was integrated. He attended New York's Townsend Harris High School for gifted children and Colgate University. At Colgate he apparently neglected to broadcast his race, which led to something of a scandal when he pledged a white fraternity and was "discovered." The fraternity dropped him, and his white roommate insisted he find other quarters. "I think I've made a mistake," he told a black classmate.

Upon graduating from Colgate, Powell entered the family business, becoming his father's deputy and business manager at Abyssinian Baptist. His "calling" seems to have been rather tenuous; Powell left no great testimony about the role of faith in his life. Indeed, he remained as familiar a figure at the Cotton Club (where his future wife, Isabel Washington, was a member of the chorus line) as he was in the Abyssinian's pulpit.

The aftermath of the Harlem riot of 1935 was notable for the disingenuous attempt by the white media to blame it on the Communists (who flocked to Harlem like buzzards to carrion after the fracas began), and for the emergence of Powell as a spokesman for the black community, chosen by the *New York Post* to give "the Negro's point of view" in a series of three articles. His arrival was, well, distinctive. "The entire Fusion administration of Mayor LaGuardia," he wrote of the liberal reformer, "is a fusion for fascism."

Powell had been building toward this notoriety for several years, marching with doctors at Harlem Hospital who protested racist hiring practices and joining the "don't buy where you can't work" picket lines that had sprouted in Harlem, as in many other black slums, in the mid-1930s. "The owners of the largest department store in Harlem, Blumsteins," Hamilton writes, "saw no need to alter what they considered an already progressive employment policy of hiring blacks as janitors and even one, a graduate of City College, as an elevator operator." The protest movement was divided between leftists, who sought—as ever, but a bit more credibly during the Great Depression—to build an alliance of the black poor and the white working class, and the black nationalists, whose goal—as ever—was control over their community. The nationalists congealed around a fellow named Sufi Abdul Hamid, who, draped in a "brightly colored cape," began railing against the "Jewish" storekeepers of Harlem. (Most of the local stores were owned by Jews, but the distinction between Jews and The Jews was neglected by the demagogues; Orlansky, after the 1943 riot, noted that anti-Semitism was widespread and casual in the community.)

Powell was ecumenical in his support of protest groups, to the dismay of more moderate black leaders, who hoped he would take a stand against Sufi and the other extremists. "He marched with them all," Hamilton writes, without offering a clue to his motivation. Was Powell at work building a political coalition? Was he uncertain or opportunistic? Ultimately Powell sided with the leftists—again, no clue as to his reason—against the nationalists: "We've got to stop this blind hatred toward all whites," he wrote in *The Amsterdam News*. "Our future will be decided not by ourselves, but by a union of working-class forces, white and black. Blind hatred will ultimately destroy only those who hate."

Socialism, however, proved to be a passing fancy. Indeed, all of this man's fancies—and alliances, and marriages—were mercurial, except one: through most of the early part of his career, Powell was an utterly implacable—aggressively irritating, in fact—opponent of segregation. He became best known for his perpetual attempts to add the "Powell Amendment," which barred the use of federal funds for any program or facility that discriminated according to race, to

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every piece of legislation that passed through the Congress. From the start, Powell was unwilling to countenance even the mildest forms of white hypocrisy. In 1940 he refused to become part of a White House committee (the invitation was considered a bold act of liberalism, no doubt) to celebrate Franklin Roosevelt's birthday by raising funds to fight polio. "I would gladly pledge full cooperation," he wrote, "if it were not for the rigid practice of discrimination against crippled Negro children and youth now being practiced at [the polio treatment hospital in] Warm Springs, Georgia."

As a member of New York's City Council in 1943, Powell campaigned fiercely against the Stuyvesant Town housing project proposed by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and supported by LaGuardia and the rest of the city's liberal establishment. The insurance company, which was looking for tax breaks and land from the city, wanted the massive project to be segregated. "Negroes and whites don't mix," said the chairman of Met Life's board. The mayor, Housing Commissioner Robert Moses, *The New York Times*, and *The Herald Tribune* all thought the housing was too important, given the expected postwar crunch, to be stopped for what Moses called "political" reasons. The project passed. A week later, Hamilton notes, "at a mass Freedom Rally in Madison Square Garden, Adam Powell called for the impeachment of Mayor LaGuardia. The audience roared its thunderous approval."

A year later, after the state legislature had drawn a Harlem district, Powell became New York's first black congressman and the nation's second. He was, by then, about to embark on his second marriage—to Hazel Scott, a well-known jazz pianist and singer. When, in 1945, the Daughters of the American Revolution refused Scott the use of Constitution Hall, Powell noted that Eleanor Roosevelt had resigned from the DAR in 1939 after Marian Anderson had been denied the use of the hall, and he demanded that Bess Truman take a similar stand. When she refused, Powell blasted her as the "last lady" of the land. Truman, furious, called Powell "that damned nigger preacher" in a staff meeting and refused to deal with him for the next six years (going so far as to send patronage jobs for Harlem through the office of William Dawson, Chicago's black representative). This may be a perfect metaphor for the "effective" portion of Powell's career: a grand rhetorical gesture, a thumb in the president's eye, maybe some heightening of consciousness in white America, certainly heightened anger in Harlem—and six years without effective representation in Congress for Powell's constituents.

ADAM CLAYTON POWELL BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Powell did not make the same mistake with Eisenhower, even though Ike had opposed not only integration of the armed forces but also "social mingling" in principle (and the thought that "a Negro should court my daughter" in particular). The Harlem representative stroked the new president, ignored his reluctance to enforce the Supreme Court's *Brown* v. *Board of Education* decision, and won, in return, a steady stream of small favors from Maxwell Rabb, the Eisenhower aide in charge of "civil rights." This moral compromise was, in a way, the beginning of Powell's end. He continued to gain seniority in Congress, and eventually, in the 1960s, he became the first black to chair a major committee, Education and Labor. But his brief moment as the country's most famous black leader—"Mr. Civil Rights," he liked to be called—was coming to an end.

For one thing, the times were catching up with him. The civil rights movement gained steam after *Brown*, and more effective leaders emerged. Before long, the Powell Amendment—now supplanted by the Civil Rights Act of 1964—became the law of the land. More important, though, Powell's reputation was catching up with him. He seemed perennially one step ahead of the law. Hamilton argues that many of his crimes were misdemeanors, and a case can be made that Powell's moral standards fell within the range acceptable for a Tammany Hall congressman. He padded his payroll and became (in Edward Koch's memorable phrase) a "povertician," getting a piece of every federal program that came to Harlem. When Powell was tried by the feds for income tax evasion, Roy Wilkins expressed a sentiment that would become rather familiar in years to come: "Many Negroes and some whites as well are asking themselves whether Adam is being singled out because he doesn't bite his tongue on civil rights."

More likely Powell was "singled out" because his style was flagrant. He was, *The New York Times* reported after the tax indictment, "obsessed with fancy living," an opportunist who "exploited the race issue in pulpit and legislative hall to gain the prestige, adulation, and money he needs for the purpose of pleasure." He wouldn't merely junket off to Europe, like many of his colleagues; he would go with two beautiful staff members, black and white, and spend the taxpayers' money in all the hottest clubs and restaurants. "What was the fuss about?" he asked. "Did they want me to take an all-black staff?"

When the House finally got around to stripping him of his chairmanship and refusing to seat him in 1967, the bill of

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particulars was lengthy, but it was not prohibitively felonious: misuse of travel funds, padding his payroll, refusal to cooperate in the New York slander suit, the junket business, running his committee capriciously. Powell's supporters, and Hamilton, could point to any of the charges and contend that white congressmen do that sort of thing all the time. "Behind me in this Congress is the biggest bunch of elected hypocrites the world has ever known," Powell announced after he'd been expelled. Perhaps, but that didn't—and Hamilton doesn't—address the question of his own guilt; or, more important, the gross fraud that Powell perpetrated on his needy constituents; or, still worse, the sense of alienation and helplessness that he had fed with his theater of resentment.

In celebrating the congressman's Pyrrhic victories, Hamilton ignores the real balance sheet—the positive impact a politician this talented might have had if he played it straight—and he doesn't deal at all with the dubious morality of a black leader who exacerbates the gulf that white racism created. Powell's badass ability to sidetrack his election campaigns into referenda on racial solidarity was only Bilbo in blackface, as grotesque as any minstrel show and certainly more insidiously destructive of the hopes of most blacks to join the larger society than the actions of any white demagogue.

By the time he was kicked out of Congress, Powell was more than a mere buffoon. As times had passed him by, he had become resentful of the civil rights leaders who succeeded him. Sometimes he worked quietly against them (as he did against Martin Luther King), sometimes he insulted them publicly (as he did Wilkins of the NAACP), sometimes he blocked legislation they favored (as he did with an adult literacy program proposed by James Farmer of CORE). He held anti-poverty legislation hostage in his committee, searching for a piece of the action, or out of pique.

With integration now the law of the land, Powell thrashed about for a position in the vanguard. Eventually he made common cause with the new generation of black nationalists. "I don't call for violence ... but the nonviolent days are over," he told a Harlem rally in 1968, surrounded by young bodyguards in military attire, one with a Bible impaled on a machete. He won re-election that year, and later he won a measure of revenge as well—the Supreme Court ruled that he'd been unconstitutionally excluded from Congress. But his time was past. Charles Rangel, running as a responsible moderate, unseated him in 1970. Powell retired to Bimini and died of cancer in 1972.

His life resonates, a preview of agony to come. Adam Clayton Powell's ability to take a moral imperative—the equality of the races—and twist it into self-aggrandizing demagoguery has been too much the story of black politics in this country. In his home city of New York, the badass style now predominates. The disingenuousness *this* time, after the Crown Heights rioting, was quite the opposite of what it was in 1943. The black leadership—the phrase is increasingly an oxymoron—refused, almost to a person, to condemn what David Dinkins correctly called the "lynching" of Yankel Rosenbaum by a black mob chanting "kill the Jew." It also has refused—again, in the name of racial solidarity—to condemn the ravings of Professor Leonard Jeffries, who "argues" that character is a function of melanin level.

Of course, this isn't all Powell's doing. The triumph of the badass style could not have been possible without a moral compromise made twenty-five years ago by the civil rights establishment. The decision to accept distinctions in the law according to race, to seek group compensation rather than equal rights, rationalized different—lower—standards for blacks. It institutionalized aggrievement as the central fact of black life. And, not so surprisingly, it gave the most aggrieved—from Afrocentric fantasists, to the toughest street kids, to the badass demagogues—a kind of authenticity they might not have enjoyed if equality had remained the goal.

The empowerment, and the celebration, of these outrageous sorts has enabled whites to get off the hook too easily. If Sharpton, Jeffries, and anomic children with Uzis define the new popular image of blackness on the evening news, it will be easier to ignore the vast majority of black people who work hard, who dread crime, who struggle to build a better life for their kids. In the end, the legacy of Adam Clayton Powell isn't progress or pride. It's showtime.

JOE KLEIN covers politics for *New York* magazine.

Politics by Other Means

BY ALAN WOLFE

Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America by James Davison Hunter

(Basic Books, 416 pp., $25)

Americans are increasingly oblivious to politics, but they are exceptionally sensitive to culture. What constitutes for other countries the meat and potatoes of political conflict—distribution of income among classes, regulation of industry, protectionism versus free trade, sectional antagonism—captures in this country only the attention of the interests immediately affected. Politics in the classic sense of who gets what, when, and how is carried out by a tiny elite watched over by a somewhat larger, but still infinitesimally small, audience of news followers. The attitude of the great majority of Americans to such traditional political subjects is an unstable combination of boredom, resentment, and sporadic attention.

Culture, on the other hand, grabs everyone's attention all the time. What for other countries are peripheral issues, if not downright trivial ones—sexual harassment, to take the current brouhaha, but also prayer in schools, condoms for teenagers, drinking, Armageddon, the theory of evolution, date rape, federal funding for erotic art, the pledge of allegiance—in this country constitute occasions for intense, almost furious concern. Merely nonplussed when their natural resources are delivered over to private development, unfazed when close advisers to their president undertake bizarre secret missions and unaccountable official actions, willing to tolerate fantastic abuses of the public trust in the name of deregulation, Americans will dial talk shows furiously and rain letters on the editors when they feel their cultural values are threatened. The smart politician is the one who mouths cultural platitudes for general consumption while supporting the self-interest of those immediately concerned with specific public policies.

Americans have reversed the usual understanding of public and private.

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The great political and economic forces that are usually understood to shape public policy are viewed as clashes between private interests. At the same time matters of religious belief, aesthetic taste, and cultural preference—once thought to be private and individualistic—assume center-stage in the large public dramas enacted in the media. We shine light on the shadowy regions of the soul even as we darken the theater in which our common destiny is enacted.

Because they practice politics in cultural terms, Americans cannot be understood with the tool kits developed by political scientists. Their attitudes do not fit the convenient ideological categories of right and left. Their behavior is not predictable on the basis of class, ethnicity, or gender. They do not do what theories of democracy suggest they ought to do to make democracy work. (And yet, contrary to another set of theories about democracy, it seems to work anyway.) They are ashamed by the very things that less democratic societies lack, such as the occasional media abuse that is a cost of freedom of the press, while taking pride in causes, such as the insistence that politicians not give themselves raises, that other democracies find vulgar. It is not because Americans are politically sophisticated that they constantly frustrate those who would understand them, but because they are politically innocent. Unable to abolish war, they have abolished politics; the state has not withered away, but the amount of attention paid to its affairs has withered badly.

It requires a sociologist to understand the priority Americans give to culture, a sociologist like James Davison Hunter. Rather than starting with a theory about democracy, Hunter addresses the culturally engaged: religious fundamentalists of all faiths and liberal modernists concerned with individual and group rights. He finds that "America is in the midst of a culture war that has and will continue to have reverberations not only within public policy but within the lives of ordinary Americans everywhere." In the United States, culture is war by other means, except that wars are usually concluded through negotiations, an option not generally available to those struggling over the nature of the holy.

Hunter is concerned with the lack of "conceptual categories or analytic tools for understanding cultural conflict," and in his own modest way he is trying to develop some such tools. The most important of his ideas is that life was easier when we fought over our ecclesiastical differences. No matter how bitter the struggles between Protestant and Catholic, pluralistic assumptions enabled both of them to maintain their identity *within* their specific religious communities. Thinking that they had settled their historic differences over religion by means of Supreme Court interpretations of the First Amendment's establishment clause, Americans stopped killing each other over theological disagreements. In so doing, however, they merely prepared the ground for cultural struggles even harder to resolve.

Religious pluralism and First Amendment tolerations are the answers to theological conflict favored by "high" churches and their leaders. No matter what their doctrinal background, liberal Protestants, Catholics, and Jews agree that we can compartmentalize religion and politics: six days a week we devote to political economy and one day, if we choose, to God. But it is just this liberal solution to religious difference that defines the gap between what Hunter calls the progressive outlook and the orthodox outlook on the world. For the orthodox—Catholic anti-abortion activists, Protestant fundamentalists, rabbis in Brooklyn—share a refusal to participate in a spiritual division of labor. They have more in common with each other than they do with more modern adherents to their own theological tenets.

Hunter argues that this shift from conflict between religions to conflicts within religions constitutes a cosmological, not a theological, split. At war are two fundamentally different visions of man in the world. Modernists, inspired by life rather than revelation, begin with the everyday and tailor their creed to adjust to its pressures. Fundamentalists, who reverse the priority, begin with an ethic and are determined to shape modern life to fit its requirements. For the orthodox, authority is external to the individual. For the progressive, it is internal to the individual. Both perspectives have among their adherents people with a wide variety of psychological dispositions, but certainty is more apt to typify the fundamentalist, while guilt and insecurity seem inevitably associated with the modernist. It often appears that the two groups live in different worlds, even on different planets. Americans who gravitate toward one of these poles literally have nothing to say to those who gravitate toward the other.

Expressed this way, cosmological conflicts are far more serious than theological ones. "The conflict is much deeper now," Hunter writes, "for it centers on what we believe, what we celebrate, how we live together, and who we are as a community and as a nation." Historians are likely to be surprised by this assertion, given the amount of blood spilled between religious groups in the past: as furious as current debates have been, they remain essentially verbal and symbolic. Still, Hunter has a point, if a historically imprecise one. There *is* a Kulturkampf taking place in the United States, and it *has* displaced politics for most Americans. Moreover, it shows no sign of being resolved, and it is surely a conflict over how we are to order our lives together."

Hunter follows the culture war through five different fields of battle: the family, education, the media, law, and electoral politics. For the orthodox, families are characterized by duty, hierarchy, obedience—but above all else by two biological parents who marry for the sake of having children. Homosexuality, for them, is a sin, and not, in the words of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, "an essential thread in the fabric of American family life." Public policy that touches on issues of family life arouses passions on both sides. The battle over whether schools in New York City should provide condoms to students with or without parental consent (a battle fought after Hunter finished his book) illustrates perfectly how the war over the family is conducted. For cultural conservatives, parental responsibility over children is sacred. Gay activists and the coalition against AIDS, at least in their public advertising campaign, appeal over the heads of parents to the teenagers themselves. For the one group, the family is what makes life possible. For the other group, the preservation of life must take priority over traditional family values.

That the battle of the condom was fought in the schools only illustrates how difficult it is to draw the line between one field of combat in our cultural wars and the others. No other area of American life has seen a more complete victory for the liberal modernist vision than education. The 1960s generation, thoroughly defeated at the level of presidential politics, won the battle for the public schools. Teachers unions became powerful forces, not only in educational policy but in politics generally. Hypermodernist demands for multicultural education received a warm welcome from school administrators. Entire fields of educational inquiry are dominated by the progressive vision; Hunter points out that more than 25 percent of the resolutions passed by the American Psychological Association since the 1960s take positions in the culture war, nearly all of

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them on the modernist side. But the result of this victory did not still the culture war over the schools. Instead, fundamentalists created their own schools, more and more students left public schools for private ones, and an eventual backlash against liberal values in the schools erupted. This war still rages.

Conservatives argue that the media and the arts are the institutions in American society most thoroughly dominated by the liberal outlook. There clearly is some truth in this charge, since not too many fundamentalists tinker with new literary techniques or postmodern methods of composition. Still, although progressives feel best about themselves when they can protest censorship, and fundamentalists give them plenty of reason to feel good, this battle is far from one-sided. A stand against censorship—say, in the context of television—places liberals together in an uneasy alliance with corporate advertisers. It is not completely clear why those who support the use of public funds to exhibit Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs should also support unlimited reruns of commercials for Egoiste. When rock music turns sexist, movies glorify violence, television sells junk to children, and pornographic comic books appeal to teenagers, liberals ought not be too smug about holding the moral high ground. Hunter is right to argue that too many people have lost the distinction between censuring and censoring. Fundamentalists prefer to censor than to censure; but liberal modernists, caught up in their own relativism, have lost the art of censure completely. Without it, they are increasingly irrelevant to larger numbers of Americans.

What makes the legal system such an important field of contention in the battle for America's soul is that it is both undemocratic and the field of choice for American liberals. Important modernist positions, including most of those dealing with the legal status of church and state, would not win popular referenda; they can only remain the law of the land if ensconced in Supreme Court decisions. As in the case with education and the media, liberal elites are comfortable with legal institutions and legal arguments; fundamentalists usually have more to occupy them than writing articles for law reviews.

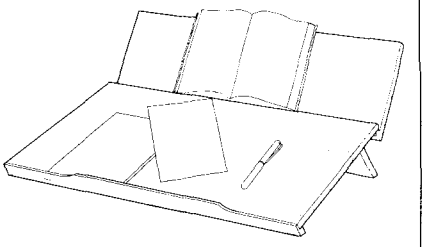
But it is in the area of law that the conservative backlash against liberal hegemony has been strongest. Liberals have no appropriate arguments to challenge the Reagan-Bush effort to pack the courts, since they packed more than a few of them themselves. Moreover, many liberal legal opinions rest on shaky ground. Why is it permissible for public schools to loan books but not maps to parochial schools? The new Supreme Court that may overturn *Roe* v. *Wade* could also have fun with *Everson* v. *Board of Education*, which established the basic principles of liberal pluralism with respect to church and state.

The culture war, finally, has invaded the turf upon which electoral campaigns are conducted. Hunter argues that the culture war creates the language of politics, and all those who would seek office must respond. As Michael Dukakis and Walter Mondale learned, there is much truth in this argument. Yet it is also the case that politicians themselves are part of the culture war. Liberal modernists tend to dominate local politics, even in conservative states, because they believe in government and are willing to accept low pay. Meanwhile, the ability of fundamentalists to shape what national Republicans say and do remains striking, epitomized by the low moment when George Bush's Department of Justice gave support to illegal anti-abortion actions in Wichita. Politicians of both parties cannot insulate themselves from the culture war. They are, increasingly, among its most active participants.

It is tempting to want to take sides in this culture war. As a sociologist, Hunter is driven by the logic of his profession to do so: after all, sociology, that cosmopolitan product of a secularized "high church" worldview, is, from a fundamentalist viewpoint, indistinguishable from socialism. It is greatly to Hunter's credit, therefore, that he remains neutral. He never stoops to make easy points against easy targets. He does his best to move inside the minds of his subjects and to present the world as they understand it. He asks us at least to consider the proposition that for many people blasphemy does exist. And although he argues throughout the book that the two worldviews he describes are not reconcilable, he does attempt to lay out steps, which he calls practical but which are somewhat utopian, that can strengthen the commitment to a common life that both sides, in his view, tend to reject. They include suggestions such as shifting the environment of discourse away from new communications technologies to venues less susceptible to demagoguery, avoiding political quiescence on both sides, recognizing that each side has a "sacred" core that ought to be respected, and paying more attention to the weaknesses of one's own position.

Hunter's evenhandedness is a rare treat in a book dealing with such contentious topics. But it is finally not convincing. Carried away by parallelisms,

Inclined to Work



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Hunter asks us to accept that both sides in the culture war mirror each other. Each paints the opposition in extremist terms. Both are intolerant. Seeking a monopoly over legitimation, each seeks to rally national symbols—the Constitution, the Bill of Rights—on behalf of its partisan vision. Both use similar direct mail and advertising techniques. "The rhetoric infused into public discourse by each side is so similar," Hunter concludes, "that without identifying the object of derision and aversion, it is nearly impossible to distinguish which of the two coalitions is speaking."

But it *is* possible. While Hunter is correct to point out the occasional arrogance and intolerance of the liberal modernists, they do speak a different language than the fundamentalists. There are more liberals who care about procedure and not just about whose ox is gored, I would venture to say, than there are honest conservatives who repudiate opportunism for the sake of principle. The terms by which most liberal modernists propose to understand the world include room for dissenting opinions, which is not true of the terms by which most fundamentalists operate. From a liberal perspective, a woman can choose whether or not to have an abortion; from a fundamentalist perspective, she cannot. (Only those free to choose can make a moral choice *not* to have an abortion, should they so decide.) Randall Terry of Operation Rescue is not the moral equivalent of Fay Wattleton of Planned Parenthood. Liberals discovered tolerance for a reason; fundamentalists have yet to learn what it is.

Nowhere is the difference between these worldviews clearer than in the fundamentalist assumption, cited numerous times throughout Hunter's book, that we are a Christian nation. At the risk of seeming intolerant to those who hold this position, we are not. There are Jews, Muslims, and any number of other non-Christians who live here and claim the rights of citizens. Fundamentalist language excludes them; liberal modernist language includes them. This is the reason, finally, that Hunter's evenhandedness fails: only one side in this war can live with the other. And the other side cannot reciprocate the respect.

If there is a genuine analogy between these two sides, it is because the fundamentalists are far more modernist than the modernists are fundamentalist. Hunter admits as much. "Virtually everyone, nowadays, is influenced by the profound philosophical reorientation of the Enlightenment," he writes. "Even the most Bible-believing Evangelical, the most Rome-bound Catholic, and the most observant Orthodox Jew has been influenced in subtle even if unacknowledged ways." Perhaps the proof of this point is the fact that fundamentalist Jews, Catholics, and Protestants formed an alliance in the first place, despite their theological differences. That alliance was not, as Hunter argues, "pragmatically necessary"; it was instead a result of the fact that even reactionaries are, in Weber's terms, "this-worldly." They accept the state, however secular, as the turf on which to fight, and they fight.

Who will win the fight? True to his balance, Hunter provides no answer, but he considers the strengths and the weaknesses of the combatants. Moreover, despite his claims at the beginning of the book that the two sides are engaged in an irreconcilable struggle in which compromise is not possible, he concludes by laying out some principles that might make the debate at least somewhat more rational. Still, one wonders if the war is not already over. The Moral Majority is no more, and an air of ridicule surrounds the television evangelists; the evil empire seeks membership in the International Monetary Fund; and the teaching of creationism as a science will hardly help us compete with the Japanese. Modernity is corrosive, which gives modernists an incontestable advantage. The most definitive proof was Reagan himself: a product of the movies, our only divorced president, a man who lived a fully modern life even while appealing for fundamentalist votes.

Hunter knows that finally the modernists have the upper hand. Although they speak out for the poor and the minorities, modernists have significant class advantages: they tend to be wealthier than the fundamentalists, better positioned to exercise influence, more comfortable with the tools of persuasion. Moreover, the orthodox communities, if they are to be politically effective, can only do so on terms established by the modernists. In the process they may, in Hunter's words, "become so assimilated to a progressive political (and linguistic) culture that they will not be capable of offering any effective opposition to the worldview that currently plagues them."

Like many other sociologists, Hunter worries that too thorough a modernist victory may turn religious belief into a matter of personal taste. At times his book reads like a lament for a lost world of faith, as if he were returning to the world of Protestant theology out of which sociology originally emerged. But in a nation composed of people with diverse religious beliefs, no single religion can provide the moral framework for a public vocabulary. Faith in private and toleration in public is the best we can do. If that is a modernist and progressive solution, so be it. We have no choice but to find a way to live together, and the only way available is predicated on modernist, not fundamentalist, terms.

ALAN WOLFE is the editor of *America at Century's End* (University of California Press).

Innocents at Home

BY PEARL K. BELL

The Night Travellers by Elizabeth Spencer

(Viking, 336 pp., $21.95)

Elizabeth Spencer, now 70 years old, has written nine novels and three collections of short stories over the past forty years. She is a marvelous example of the hugely gifted "minor" writer (like Sarah Orne Jewett) who speaks for her time and place but whose work fails to survive the inconstant fluctuations of taste and fashion. *The Night Travellers*, her absorbing new novel, should prompt a rediscovery of Spencer, or at least a reassessment of her career.

In the heyday of Southern writing some thirty-odd years ago, Spencer was for a time one of the bright young stars in that steamy firmament. Born and raised in Mississippi, where literary talent seemed to burn in every hamlet, she started out with some highly acclaimed novels and short stories about a part of the Deep South that had already been heavily mined by such older writers as William Faulkner and Eudora Welty. Between 1948 and 1956, Spencer published three novels about *her* Mississippi: *Fire in the Morning*, *The Crooked Way*, and *The Voice at the Back Door*. With what she

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later described as "youthful urgency," she poured into those books her uniquely rich store of Mississippi life: its dusty-cotton landscape, its families and clans bursting with a writer's dream of eccentrics, rebels, bigots, and hell-raisers. As Spencer reflected years later, these three novels appeared when "the 'Southern Renaissance' was in full tide.... It made the South itself seem enough and more as subject to explore, as object of some ultimate vision."

Still, despite the praise and the prizes lavished on these early novels, they soon faded into obscurity. So much arresting fiction was flowing out of the American South in those years, it was inevitable that much of it, even the work of strong writers, could not endure beyond the initial flush of success. Spencer was blessed with a lyrical imagination, but this was not enough to withstand the blight of familiarity. For all their stylistic perfection and psychological acumen, and their "right-minded" sympathies about racial injustice, her novels lacked the transcendent originality, the "ultimate vision," that distinguished the Southern masters: the demonic writhings of history in Faulkner, the wild farce and piercing nostalgia of Welty, the freaks and grotesques of McCullers, the God-intoxicated fanatics and violence of O'Connor. Compared with the bizarre configurations of these writers, which seemed to capture the dark essence of Southern life, Spencer's novels were too nice, too much like too many other Southern stories, too lacking in the coils of Gothic nightmare that readers and critics craved.

Fortunately, Spencer's life swerved in an unexpected direction when she was in her 30s, taking her far from Mississippi, and the change of scene liberated her talent from the provincial limitations of the South. What freed her was Italy. She went there first on a fellowship, and stayed on for several years after marrying an Englishman who worked there. Living in Italy, burrowing into its entrancing foreignness, she took her place in that long line of American writers, from Hawthorne and James to the innumerable exiles tossed up by the storms of war, whose sensibilities were transformed by their encounter with Europe.

In Rome and Florence and Sicily, in a country utterly different from rural Mississippi, Spencer's imagination was startled, honed, enlarged by the exhilarating intimacy with a new language and an ancient culture. As she later observed, in Italy "my experience was now broken into pieces, no less valid, perhaps no less interesting—perhaps even more relevant, I was tempted to speculate, to the restless life of the world." And yet, since serious writers can never wholly abandon their native ground no matter where they choose to settle, she continued to write about Mississippi. But under the influence of Italy her approach to the world from which she came now displayed a cool detachment, free of the sentimentality that had lurked within her earlier work. The new stories, such as "First Dark," about a tyrannical Southern matriarch's attempt, through the weight of possessions, to control her daughter's life from the grave, were marked by subtle acerbity, and a tough acknowledgment of the destructiveness and deceit of family ties, such as one finds in the "amoral familialism" of Italy.

In the best work spawned by her years abroad, Italy provided the dominant mood, with its liveliness and chaos and maddening inefficiency, its charming intensities and dangers, a foil for American innocents bewildered by its myriad temptations, yet succumbing to its hazards of enchantment. In two short novels set in Italy, Spencer brought a fresh, ironic wit and cool affection to the interplay of American ingenuousness and Italian guile. And she was even able to demonstrate how slippery such stereotypes can sometimes prove to be.

In *The Light in the Piazza*, which appeared in 1960, the tables are turned: for once it is American cunning, oiled by money, that triumphs over Italian gullibility and greed. Margaret Johnson, a well-to-do and thoroughly conventional matron from Winston-Salem, is traveling in Italy with her grown daughter Clara, a glowing beauty whose mental development was arrested by an accident at the age of 8. Since then, Mrs. Johnson has lived with that irreversible tragedy as the constant burden of her days, consuming her spirit and flouting all hope forever. But in the blaze of a Florentine summer, she is invaded by an unthinkable dream: that her stunted daughter may one day happily marry.

A handsome young Italian, not retarded but disarmingly childlike, falls in love with Clara, and as Mrs. Johnson nervously watches the flowering of this seemingly unacceptable romance, she is torn between the obligation to reveal the truth to the besotted young man and his steely-eyed father, and the urge to let the chips of love fall where they may. Italy has changed everything; only in Italy can she harbor the thought of a happy ending for her unfortunate child:

> She entered thus from that day a conscious duality of existence, knowing what she should and must do, and making no motion toward doing it. The Latin temperament may thrive on such subtleties and never find it necessary to conclude them, but to Mrs. Johnson the experience was strange and new. It confused her. She believed, as most Anglo-Saxons do, that she always acted logically and to the best of her ability on whatever she knew to be true. And now she found this quality immobilized and all her actions taken over by the simple drift of the days. She had, in fact, come face to face with Italy.

Just how this morally conflicted mother maneuvers her way out of this dilemma is rendered with Spencer's supple grasp of both the comedy and the pathos of the situation. With brilliant control of all the human and cultural complexities, American and Italian, played out in this short novel, Spencer pays equal justice to farce and to sorrow, to the miracle of Italy that can somehow defy the somber permanence of human catastrophe.

Some years after Spencer moved from Italy to Montreal, she drew upon her Italian experience in a very different novel, *Knights and Dragons* (1964). It is a difficult and elusive work, and its meaning does not yield itself as winningly as that of *The Light in the Piazza*. The dark tone of the story is underscored throughout by evasive images, chains of suggestion and intimation whose significance remains just out of reach. We are told at the start that Martha Ingram, who works for the American cultural attaché in Rome, came to Italy to escape her former husband, a famous and famously domineering philosopher. From New York he harasses his former wife, bombarding her mercilessly with self-pitying letters full of hectoring complaints and commands, and with messengers whose mission is vague but to Martha gravely unsettling.

Gradually we begin to suspect, as we probe Spencer's hallucinatory web of indirection, that Martha's obsession with her former husband—she had been his student—is pathological, and that at least some of these letters and messengers perhaps exist only in her paranoid imagination. Yet although Spencer does finally declare that Martha is mad, this small and potent word resists definition as she uses it. For one thing, the tormented young woman manages to do her work at the embassy with unaffected competence. Nor does Spencer give us the clues to unriddle the effect on Martha's state of mind of her doomed love affair with a visiting American economist. Like a watercolor whose tints have wept in the rain,

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Myths About Israel and the Middle East (2)

Should we re-examine endlessly repeated clichés?

In a previous installment in this series of clarifying messages about Israel and the Middle East, we examined certain myths which, by dint of constant repetition, had acquired currency and acceptance. We looked at the myth of "Palestinian nationhood", the myth of the Gaza Strip and Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") being "occupied territory", the myth that Jewish settlements in these territories are "the greatest obstacle to peace", and the myth that Israel is unwilling to "yield land for peace". And we cleared up the greatest myth of all, namely that Israel's administration of the territories and not Arab determination to destroy the state, is the root cause of the conflict between the Arabs and Israel. But these are not all the myths; there are more.

What are some of these myths?

■ **Myth:** The Arabs of Israel are a persecuted minority without civil and political rights.
Reality: The 700,000 non-Jews (mostly Arabs) who are citizens of Israel have the same civil rights that Jews have. They vote, are members of the Knesset (parliament), and are part of Israel's civil and diplomatic services. Arabs have full access to the Israeli legal, health and educational systems, including Arabic and Moslem universities. The only difference between the "rights" of Arabs and Jews is that the Jews must serve three years in the military and at least one month a year until age of 50. The Arabs have no such obligation. For them, military service is voluntary. But, very few avail themselves of the privilege.
■ **Myth:** Israel should give up Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") because strategic depth is meaningless in this age of missiles.
Reality: Israel is a mini-state – about half the size of San Bernardino county in California. If another, even smaller mini-state were carved out of it, Israel would be totally indefensible. That is the opinion of 100 retired U.S. generals, and admirals as conveyed to the President of the U.S. If the Arabs were to occupy whatever little strategic depths Israel has between the Jordan River and its populated coast, they would not need any missiles. Artillery and mortars would suffice, since Israel would be only nine miles wide at its waist. Those who urge such a course either do not understand the situation or have a death wish for Israel.
■ **Myth:** If Israel would allow a Palestinian state to arise in Judea/Samaria and in the Gaza Strip it would be a democratic state and would be totally demilitarized.
Reality: There is no prospect at all that anything resembling a democratic state could be created. There is not a single democratic Arab state – all of them are tyrannies of varying degrees. Even today, under Israeli administration, the PLO, the Islamic fundamentalists, and other factions fight for supremacy and ruthlessly murder each other. A country torn apart by civil strife like Lebanon is likely to be a much better prospect. As for demilitarization, it is totally unlikely that – with Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, all of which are in a declared state of war with Israel at its borders – a power vacuum would be possible. Despite pious promises, the arms merchants of the world would find a great new market and the neighboring hostile Arab countries would be happy to supply anything else that might be needed.
■ **Myth:** Israel should make "confidence building" gestures for the sake of peace.
Reality: What really is it that the world expects Israel to do for the sake of peace? Twenty-one of the 22 Arab countries consider themselves in a state of war with Israel and don't even recognize its "existence". That has been going on for over 43 years. Wouldn't it be about time that the Arabs made some kind of a "gesture"? Could they not for instance terminate the state of war? Could they not finally abolish the economic boycott against Israel that has been in place for over 40 years – long before Israel came into the administration of the "West Bank"? Could they not stop the yearly charade of attempting the expulsion of Israel from the United Nations? Could they not withdraw that slanderous resolution ramroded about 16 years ago through the General Assembly of the United Nations that Zionism, the liberation movement of the Jewish people, is racism? Any single one of these would be such a "gesture", but none is forthcoming.

It appears likely that, sometime quite soon perhaps, the parties to the Mid-East conflict – Israel, the Arab nations, and the Arab residents of Judea/Samaria and the Gaza Strip – will finally get together in a peace conference. And chances are that all the old clichés will be trotted out, all the old myths resurrected in order to pressure Israel to make "concessions". Israel is America's staunchest ally and certainly its only true ally in that area of the world. It is in our national interest that stark reality, not myths, govern any peace negotiations.

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Martha's deterioration, as the affair winds to its inevitable end with the economist's departure for home, is hinted at, in tiny pellets of blurred suggestion dropped here and there, but none of it coheres.

Yet *Knights and Dragons*, despite the opacity of its characters and plot, exerts a haunting fascination. While the human figures in the novella are obstinately baffling, Rome takes over as the true protagonist, with its laboriously excavated past and its crumbling present, its sinister alleys and damp winters, its arrogant monuments and ferocious traffic:

> Now Rome was deep in winter, with early dusks, blurred neon on the rush of shining streets. *Tramontana*, the wind from the mountains, struck bitterly, or heavy weather moved in from the sea: the great *campagna* around Rome became a dreary battlefield of contentious air, and one had to be sorry for the eager Americans, there for one year only, who now had to learn that a sunny, amiable, amusing, golden land has passed in one night into a dreary, damp, cold dungeon of a world where everybody was out to cheat them and none of them could get warm.

It is clear that Spencer conceived this puzzling novella as a literary experiment, a conscious turning away from the exacting realism of her earlier work, as she probed the mysteries of a degenerating mind. And yet, perversely, it is her keenly observant eye, her assured sense of scene, that fuels the power of this work.

When a writer's experience has presented her with a great subject like the confrontation between Americans and Europe, one can't help regretting her refusal to use it to the fullest. But Europe soon loosened its hold on Spencer's imagination, though Italy played an incidental role in *No Place for an Angel* (1967), a weak novel, undermined by too many abrupt shifts of time and place, about the marital difficulties of two American couples. From now on she turned her undivided attention back to her homeland: to New Orleans in *The Snare* (1972) and to the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, ravaged by a hurricane, in *The Salt Line* (1984). In both books Spencer's importunate fascination with landscape, terrain, the look and the feel of place, overwhelmed the characters and the tangled plots. Even her psychological acuity was diminished by her absorption in atmospheric detail. Neither novel is memorable, except for the curiously off-key melodrama enacted by hoods, gangsters, drug dealers, shootouts. A nice Southern lady, in sum, slumming in a lowlife world of thugs that she didn't understand and recoiling from its vulgarity.

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And yet Spencer can still surprise, which is not something that a writer can ordinarily do at the age of 70. Her new novel is astonishingly different, and far more ambitious, than any of her previous work, reaching into areas and issues she has never touched before: a historical novel of sorts about the recent American past. Politics has never entered her work until now, and at first it does seem odd that she has chosen this moment in American time, so long after the 1960s have dissolved into history, to deal with that convulsive decade and the activists who violently opposed the Vietnam War. Though there have by now been more than enough novels about the war itself and the futile pursuit of victory in Southeast Asia, relatively few writers have dealt with those protesters on the home front, the radical underground of draft resisters who fled to Canada or Sweden. (Two novels that come to mind are Marge Piercy's *Vida*, a wooden ideological tract about a hunted woman of Weatherman, and M. F. Beale's *Amazon One*, a vivid portrayal, untainted by polemic, of stoned revolutionaries in California, blowing up the hated citadels of power.)

What sets *The Night Travellers* apart is Spencer's point of departure. We have here a new kind of American experience. The "traditional" theme, which Spencer explored in her youth, was that of the American wanderers who go to Europe to find themselves, realize they are innocents abroad, but are changed by the encounter with a foreign land. Now Spencer is confronting a new kind of American innocent, those who rejected their country for political reasons, and she has sought to capture the painful dislocations of that different form of exile. Though the enraged militants are necessarily a vital part of her story, she focuses primarily on the wives and children who were forced to flee. Victims of a political movement they neither believe in nor fully understand, they pay a heavy price for crimes they had no mind to commit, and they become "pilgrim wanderers... homeless, trusting, lost and innocent."

Mary Harbison, a gentle girl from a prominent North Carolina family, is possessed from childhood by a passionate desire to become a great dancer. She has no interest in politics, even though she's vaguely aware that her mother, Kate, a biologist, is doing research on war chemicals in a lab at the local university. Mary resents and fears her mother, a hard and abusive woman incapable of warmth or affection. Instead of marrying "well" and embracing the snug bourgeois life her mother envisaged, Mary falls in love with Jeff Blaise, a brilliant graduate student from backwoods Louisiana who embodies everything Kate abhors: "Disturbances drew him. He'd joined the student movement in Ann Arbor, not just a name on a list but a serious worker."

When Jeff's dissertation is rejected because his views are considered too radical (in the politically correct 1990s, of course, he'd be offered a full professorship), he becomes an agitator in the Movement, writes a column for an underground paper, and, as the war escalates, blows up a munitions plant. From that moment he becomes a fugitive, and Mary the victim of his distorted idealism. They must travel at night, protected by the dark.

After smuggling Mary and their baby into Canada and settling them in a drab section of Montreal, Jeff disappears for months at a time, hiding out with comrades or radical-chic sympathizers. Though he sends his wife letters and money, little of it reaches her. As Spencer slowly discloses the poverty and terror that begin to consume the helpless young woman, unable to survive on her own, her suffering becomes searingly poignant. For Mary is more than *dépaysée*: though she is occasionally befriended by compassionate neighbors, she has been cut off from everything she has known, and feels threatened by every footstep and tap at the door. And when she finally, in unbearable desperation, turns to her mother for help, she unwittingly sets in motion her reactionary stepfather's plan to destroy her beloved husband, by having him arrested and sent to fight in Vietnam.

Spencer is at her best in the Canadian chapters of the novel: she knows the country and brings it to life with her customary powerful feeling for place. But on another level the book is less persuasive, and the flaw stems from Spencer's indecisive approach to the 1960s and the ideas of the militant radicals. Jeff's mentor, once a professor at Johns Hopkins, declares without a trace of irony or skepticism that he knows of a government "contingency plan" to kill off "the Orientals" because they are "multiplying faster than we are. If we don't kill them off now, it is suggested, they will overtake us early in the next century." One would like to think that Spencer is sending up the professor's demented gullibility, but it's hard to know just what her intentions are in this passage.

Just as Doris Lessing couldn't seem to make up her mind in *The Good Terrorist* whether her scruffy revolutionaries are heroes or bungling idiots, Spencer fails to make it clear where she stands, and the book is weakened by this ambivalence. In a novel suffused with the radical turmoil of the 1960s, the viewpoint of the writer is not inconsequential; and it is almost always entwined in the narrative. Her portrait of Jeff Blaise is replete with the familiar sloganeering indictments of American society, but it all sounds as simple-minded as the songs of Pete Seeger, and it diminishes the plausibility of the tale. Still, the portrait of the wife and child caught in a nightmare makes *The Night Travellers* so affecting.

In looking back at her work, it is clear that Spencer is a serious writer with estimable gifts of style and sensibility. Her subtle intelligence and shrewdly observant eye have been remarkably undimmed by age. And yet one has to call her a minor writer. This is not to disparage her talents. The minor writer, bound to a locale and a way of looking at the world, may not be able to transcend that particularity but nonetheless has an honorable role in American fiction, offering a believable sense of time and place. We have many minor writers, though in recent years they have been overshadowed by a flashy and tendentious horde of minimalists and know-nothings. Elizabeth Spencer reminds us that some of them deserve a place in the sun.

PEARL K. BELL is a writer who lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 6*

Halfalutin

To the editors:

In "The Half-President" (September 30), Sidney Blumenthal complains about George Bush: "The president tells us to be proud to be proud, to believe in belief, to have faith in faith, to resolve to have resolve." The next thing you know, he's going to tell us, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

ROGER SWEENY
Norwood, Massachusetts

Les deux S

To the editors:

In his splendid review of *The Divine Sarah: A Life of Sarah Bernhardt* ("The Sacred Monster," October 14), Roger Shattuck attributes authorship of *Fédora* to Dumas. Actually *Fédora* was written by Victorien Sardou, who was so closely tied to Sarah in the public's mind as to be collectively dubbed with her as "les deux S."

DORIS BLAISDELL
Lubbock, Texas

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

The higher hustle

REMEMBER ANGELA WRIGHT? THE former p.r. director for the EEOC was the witness who wasn't called. She may or may not have been telling the truth, but she was certainly willing to tell something. Wright's claims, moreover, were supported by a witness named Rose Jourdain, who was also willing to testify. Yet neither was brought before the hearings. It might be assumed that Wright didn't testify because she was intimidated by the rough treatment of Hill, or because she was not really credible. After all, Wright had been fired by Clarence Thomas, who claimed he acted summarily after she used the word "faggot." But the assumption that Wright was scared off, for whatever reason, turns out to be false. She was simply never invited. As Wright waited offstage, the Democrats on the committee caved in to Republican pressure to prevent her appearance, according to *The Los Angeles Times*. For Republicans, reported Douglas Frantz and Sam Fulwood III, it was "a victory in their attempt to isolate Hill and raise doubts about her character and motives. Democrats said that the decision not to require Wright's public testimony was the result of time constraints and concern about Republican threats to attack her." It was not Wright who was consumed with fear, but the Democrats.

THE DEAL CONCERNING WRIGHT did permit her unsworn, but public, testimony to be submitted as part of the record—and it has gone unchallenged and virtually unnoticed. It was released after midnight to a dwindling band of the press as John Doggett began unleashing his unexcelled narcissism. (A paragraph or two about Wright was buried in the press the next morning.) Her account to the committee of Thomas's sexual advances would seem to establish a pattern: Anita Hill, whom Wright has never met, was not alone. Wright's slightly jaded, worldly tone in the sixty-nine-page document could not be more different than Hill's bruised naïveté. In a hard-edged voice, Wright describes Thomas's allegedly insistent demands that she go out with him, his compulsive comments about her body and other women's, his unwanted late-night knocking on her apartment door. Wright says these things were not "traumatic," nor even something she'd call sexual harassment. "We are talking about a thing that, you know, pretty much pops out of Clarence Thomas's mouth when he feels like saying this.... We are talking about a general mode of operating." There is not a jot of "political correctness" in Wright's matter-of-fact assertions; it's hardly surprising to learn that she was a founder of the Black Republican Congressional Staff Association, through which she met Thomas. Thomas's conspiracy-mongering and the right's instant ideological finger-pointing cannot explain her away. Nor does her obvious motive—her loathing of Thomas—deny her claims.

FOR ALL THE DETAIL about Thomas's peculiar courtship methods, the most suggestive aspect of Wright's statement is not about sex. It's about Thomas's technique of racial mau-mauing. With his rant about lynching, Thomas not only saved himself but obliterated his reason for being. The case for the black conservative on the basis of merit alone was drowned by his racial appeals. But perhaps this isn't the enormous contradiction it appears to be. Wright recounts being present when Thomas offered advice to another black in the office on how to cope with his financial difficulty—"mortgage or whatever," she says. According to Wright, Thomas told him: "Well, you know why you can't get any money? Because you're not black enough. Now, if you grew an Afro and put on a Dashiki, you would get all the government money you want." From the way she presents Thomas's remark, it does not even seem ironic. She relates it in a series of stories to highlight her view of his manipulative egotism. If true, this incident helps to clarify the seeming quandary about Thomas's politics. For him, the race-man routine may not be at odds with his conservative posture. The two parts are integrated, if you will, as the higher hustle. This doesn't mean he doesn't believe his own hustle, of course. He deploys it with an air of intense conviction.

THOUGH MYSTERIES REMAIN, Peggy Noonan, the Republican speechwriter and *Mirabella* columnist, has discerned the absolute truth of the affair in the makeup of the female witnesses. In *The New York Times*, she saw a cataclysmic struggle between "normal humans" and "the chattering classes," those seeking "truth" and those who "thirst for ideological victory." The telltale sign of this battle between masses and elite was the "straight-shooting Maybellined" face of J.C. Alvarez, a character witness for Thomas, and the "unmakeupped face" of Judge Susan Hoerchner, a character witness for Hill. "Really," writes Noonan, "it was no contest. Ms. Alvarez was the voice of the real, as opposed to the abstract, America." Noonan presents Alvarez as the representative of "people who work in laundromats and, oddly enough weren't invited to the hearing room." Alvarez tried to establish her populist bonafides herself by claiming the trip to Washington cost her $900 she didn't have and that she was "John Q. Public." Alvarez may lack the polish of the Yale Law School graduate, but she doesn't exactly fit the Noonan stereotype either. According to *The Chicago Tribune*, after Alvarez left the EEOC she became the director of corporate communications for Anheuser-Busch Inc. The beer company then invested in setting her up as the supplier of Budweiser to the north side of Chicago—a large, safe, lucrative franchise. Presumably, no minority set-asides involved for the only Hispanic female distributor in the country. J.C., this Bud's for you.

PEGGY NOONAN'S GREAT RHETORical skill, adroitly employed by Dan Rather (whose CBS radio commentaries Noonan wrote), Ronald Reagan, and George Bush, has been to evoke a variety of moods—nostalgia, sadness, optimism, and so on. Sometimes, however, her efforts lack the very feeling they intend to arouse; they are too obviously hollow. In her op-ed piece, the patronizing tone toward her imagined downtrodden heroes overwhelmed the fabricated resentment. It was Brechtian typology as Republican kitsch. In Noonan's book, *What I Saw at the Revolution*, her persona as Candide was a brilliant literary device that had the effect of exposing the artificiality of the Reagan White House. Now, however, the device is off-key. Borrowing patent Archie-cisms such as "chattering classes," she summons up a strained final conflict in which "normal Americans will carry the day." If Hill's defenders were "unmakeupped," then her story was the opposite. In Noonan's fantasy of cultural Armageddon, the differences between the two sides are purely, literally, cosmetic.

SIDNEY BLUMENTHAL

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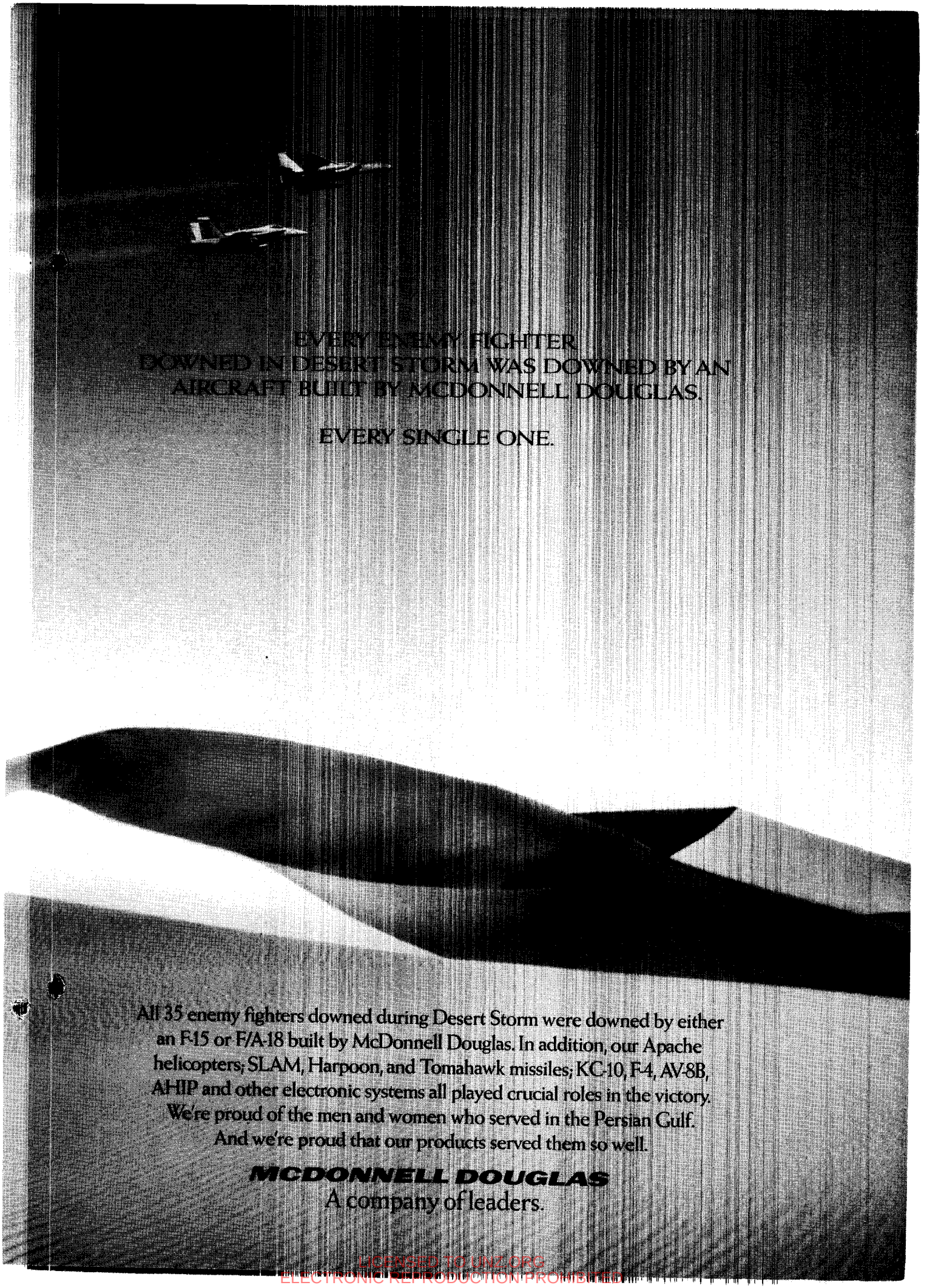
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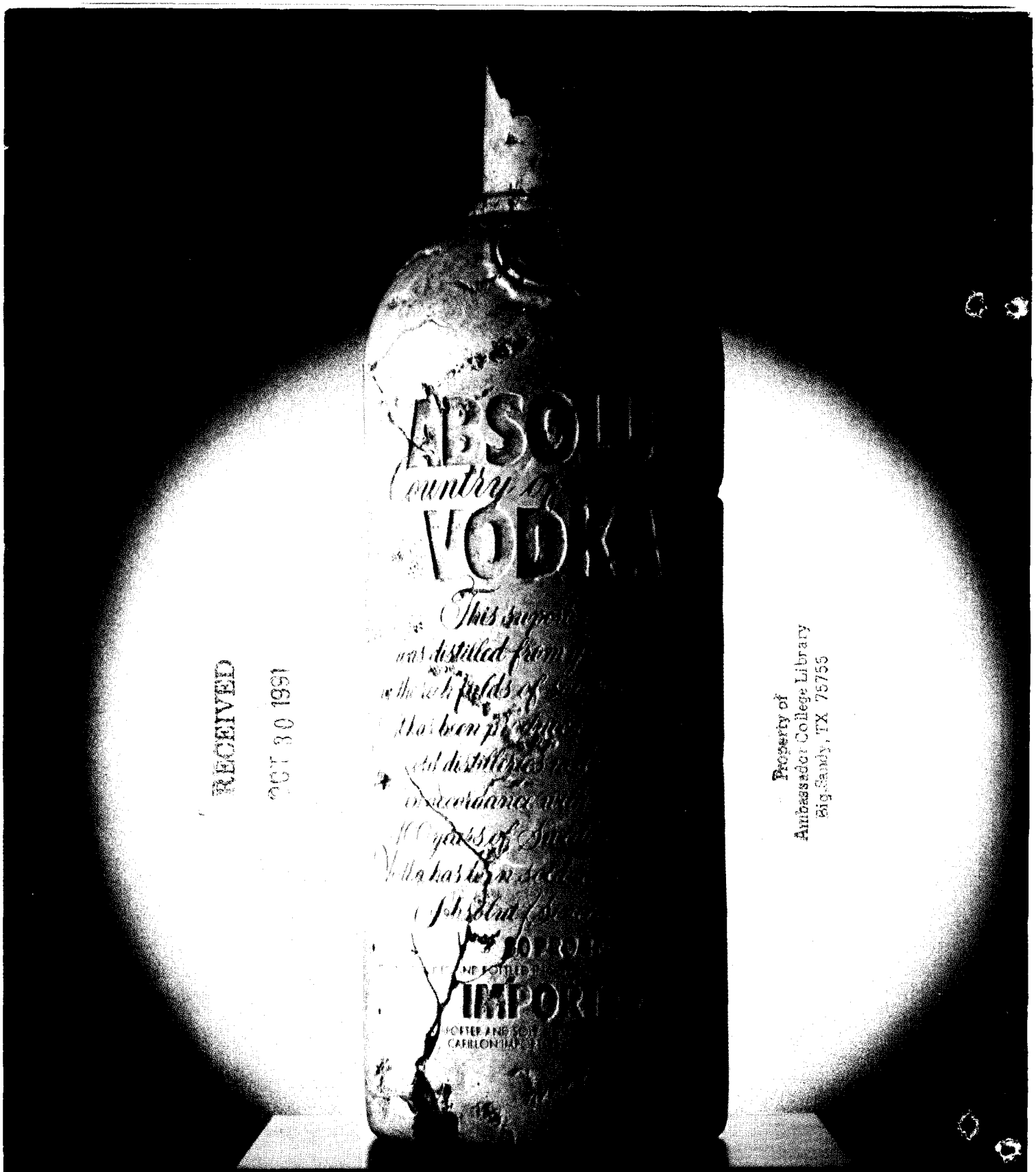

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